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on Life at Holy Cross, 1978-2018

**James B. Nickoloff, Editor**

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**Expanded Edition**

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## **Dedication**

This volume is dedicated to Marybeth Kearns-Barrett, Director of the Office of the College Chaplains at the College of the Holy Cross, with deep respect and affection. In word and deed she has taught all who know her what love is—that is, who God is. To no group has she given more than to the LGBTQIA+ students of Holy Cross.



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## FOREWORD TO THE EXPANDED EDITION

The College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts is widely known as a place of hospitality. Indeed, students at the College regularly cite a sense of community as one of the school's outstanding features. Not all students, of course, feel as if they are part of the community. This has been especially true for those who constitute a minority due to their race, socio-economic, class, ethnicity, disability, or other factors. Sometimes these students' stories appear in the student newspaper or come up in class discussion: most of the time their isolation, fear, and alienation remain hidden and their voices inaudible during their four years on campus. Students whose psychosexual orientation is other than exclusively heterosexual have long fallen into this category at Holy Cross. But the path to visibility and audibility for those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or asexual is complicated by a reality that other minorities do not face: the official teaching of the Catholic Church to which Holy Cross is linked by heritage and choice. As all know, the magisterium of the Church views their affective make-up as "intrinsically disordered" and their decisions to act on their feelings as "sinful."<sup>1</sup> Whether Catholic or not, such students thus face a daunting task at Holy Cross when they attempt to be honest with themselves and others, when they seek psychological health, and when they pursue spiritual maturity.

The present volume presents the reflections of twelve people who graduated from Holy Cross between 1978 and 2018. The stories are told in chronological order, thus allowing the reader to appreciate changes, both subtle and dramatic, that occurred at the College over four decades. The aim of this book is two-fold. First, the voices heard here and the lives they make visible represent a significant chapter in the evolution of the College from a relatively closed, mono-cultural institution into a place of far greater openness and acceptance for *all* people. And secondly, the lives chronicled here, simply

<sup>1</sup> "Magisterium" refers to the official teaching authority of the Catholic Church, that is, the pope and the bishops. A brief summary of the Vatican's official view of homosexuality, homosexual persons, and homosexual acts may be found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraphs 2357-2359 and 2396. The most complete presentation of the magisterium's view was published by the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in its "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons" (1986). More recently, the Vatican Congregation for Catholic Education (for Catholic Institutions) has discussed issues of sexuality and gender in "'Male and Female He [sic] Created Them': Towards a Path of Dialogue on the Question of Gender Theory in Education" (2019). All three documents are available on-line.

and honestly, call into question the official Catholic understanding of the human person. Even more importantly, the authors challenge those who call themselves disciples of Jesus to grow in faith, hope, and love. In other words, their very lives invite us all to conversion.

Before the 1990s, LGBTQ<sup>2</sup> students at Holy Cross mostly suffered in silence; few told anyone—friends, teachers, chaplains, counselors, or family members—about their sexuality during their college years. In January 1992, at the request of an isolated but courageous lesbian student and with the enthusiastic support of its Director, the late Kim McElaney, the College Chaplains' Office began a support group for gay and lesbian students. The group provided a safe space for students to share their struggles related to sexuality while building a sense of community. The location and time of the weekly meetings were kept confidential, as was the group's membership. For most, entering the group was a first step in "coming out," and thus it was important to establish an atmosphere of trust.

As people in the support group shared their experiences with one another, they expressed a desire to have other members of the Holy Cross community understand the challenges they faced and the contradictions they experienced at a college where social justice and the dignity of the person are so highly prized. In the fall of 1993 an anonymously written letter to the editor of *The Crusader* eloquently described the reality of life at Holy Cross for a lesbian student. (See the chapter by Meghan T. Sweeney in this volume.) Angered by the pain and injustices described by the letter's author, leaders of the student organization Pax Christi met with faculty and chaplains to discuss how the campus might respond. Working with the Student Government Association and the Chaplains' Office, Pax Christi invited the well-known author of *On Being Gay*, Brian McNaught, to campus in March 1994. The evening was a pivotal moment in Holy Cross history when hundreds of students packed the Hogan Ballroom to listen to the Jesuit-

<sup>2</sup> As all are aware, there is no universally accepted acronym for those whose sexual identity is other than exclusively heterosexual. The original edition of this book featured the stories of Holy Cross graduates who called themselves "lesbian," "gay," and/or "queer." This expanded version includes the story of one person who identifies as "transgender." In the course of the past three decades, various acronyms and ordering of the letters have been used by campus organizations. This is true today. The subtitle of this expanded volume, which employs LGBTQIA+, reflects the editor's awareness of the wider range of sexual identities. However, in this Foreword and in the final chapter ("An Interpretation"), "LGBTQ" will be used as it more accurately reflects the volume's content. The lone exception concerns references to those organizations which prefer a different arrangement of the letters.



educated McNaught share his experiences of growing up gay and Catholic. At the conclusion of his talk, McNaught challenged Holy Cross to form a gay-straight alliance.

Motivated by a desire to transform Holy Cross into a more just and inclusive community, student leaders, faculty, chaplains, and administrators began meeting to discuss what an “Allies” group might look like on campus. The Student Government Association approved the Allies constitution in the spring of 1994; nevertheless, further conversations were needed before Holy Cross president, Rev. Gerard Reedy, S.J., approved the organization’s constitution in the fall of 1994. As the constitution explained, Allies was “[i]nspired by the Jesuit educational ideal of being men and women for others.” Allies belonged on a Catholic campus, it was argued, because “[h]omophobia, like any form of discrimination, takes a significant toll on the ability of all persons to grow to their full potential.”

Official recognition of Allies by the College administration enabled Holy Cross to make major strides in educating all members of the community about homophobia, Catholic teaching concerning homosexuality, and other issues of concern to LGBTQ students. By the fall of 1995 students began organizing and celebrating Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual History Month (October) which included alumni panels, films, and student-faculty lunches. Similar events have been held on campus every fall until today.

While Brian McNaught’s speech in 1994 was critical, in the spring of 1995 two of Holy Cross’ own helped ensure that the College would never be the same. Jeannie Seidler (’96), then a junior, and Nan O’Connor (’84) spoke together about “Being Lesbian at Holy Cross” to an overflowing crowd in the Hogan Ballroom. (See chapters two and five of this volume.) Jeannie and Nan received a standing ovation. For the first time homosexual persons at Holy Cross had faces, and the College embraced two of them.

While the existence of Allies and increasing numbers of “out” students proved to be major steps in making Holy Cross more inclusive, LGB students continued to feel that they were not fully accepted as members of the College community. Desiring a “voice” on campus, a group of gay, lesbian, and bisexual students formed the Association of Bisexuals, Gays, and Lesbians (ABiGaLe). Once again the students brought their wishes to the chaplains. In a letter dated March 24, 1997 requesting formal recognition by the College, the students wrote,

At Holy Cross the gay, lesbian, and bisexual community does not have a face.

The oppression we experience comes partly from people who do not know whom

they oppress. Closeted students who live in fear and isolation because of homophobia and heterosexism have no idea where or who their gay, lesbian, and bisexual brothers and sisters are. We may more effectively work against such harmful ignorance if we can stand up and speak for ourselves instead of being spoken for. Instead of feeling frustrated over our anonymity, we may take pride in our autonomy.

With the support of the Chaplains' Office and the Office of Student Affairs, the students brought their request to President Gerard Reedy, S.J. After extensive negotiations with College administrators, ABiGaLe was officially recognized as a student organization on December 1, 1997.

With the formation of the support group in 1992, incidents of homophobia such as name-calling, bullying, and threats to students who were "out" or thought to be gay, lesbian, or bisexual--threats which always existed--began to be addressed in public forums on campus. Over the years vigils have been held to decry ignorant and often hateful behavior, and "Ally" stickers were distributed to students, faculty, administrators, and staff in an attempt to create a more supportive environment. With the recognition of ABiGaLe, one of the first acts of the students was to offer Safe Space training and stickers to members of the College community who wished to be supportive.

As is clear, by 1997 student initiative had succeeded in creating and obtaining official recognition for LGBTQ student groups at Holy Cross. By contrast, faculty, staff, and alumni did not step forward for many more years. There had been an attempt in the mid-1990s to form an LGBTQ faculty and staff support group, but few people were willing to come out publicly, and many expressed fear about job security. It was only in 2012 that the LGBTQ Alumni Network was established, and the following year the affinity group Outfront was formed to support LGBTQ faculty and staff and to promote educational efforts related to LGBTQ issues. Meanwhile, Allies and ABiGale merged in 2014 and became PRIDE (People Respecting Individual Diversity and Education) and then simply Pride in 2016. Although there was concern among some that this merger might end up concealing openly LGBTQ students on campus and muffling their voices, this does not seem to have occurred. In 2016 Prof. K. J. Rawson launched the Digital Transgender Archive. Also in 2016 the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion established Project Q+ which serves as a repository for all College LGBTQIA+ -related artifacts. The year before, the GLBTQ Alumni Oral History Project was begun with interviews published in



Crossworks, the online digital repository of the intellectual, creative, and scholarly work of the College.

Two special events in 2019 in particular symbolize the sea change that has taken place at the College. In March and April, in conjunction with the Worcester Historical Museum, LGBTQ+ Worcester for the Record, and Scholarship in Action, an exhibit of LGBTQ+ writings, oral histories, and objects called “I’m Not the Only One” was mounted on campus. Also in March Holy Cross hosted the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual IgnatianQ Conference which brings together students representing most of the 28 Jesuit colleges and universities in the U.S. to explore LGBTQIA+ identity in the context of Jesuit education.

No one can doubt that the College has come a long way, and yet in the new millennium Holy Cross still struggles with age-old prejudice, hatred, and even violence against those whose affectivity is not exclusively heterosexual. This sometimes includes the internalized self-loathing of LGBTQ students themselves. In the chapters that follow, the reader will encounter some ugly incidents but also the forthright responses made by individuals and by the College as an institution. The truth is that even in 2019 many still fear coming out to family, friends, and the wider community, and thus the work of pastoral care, critical analysis, and cultural transformation must go on. This volume aims to reveal part of the collective history of Holy Cross that too often remains hidden and to help the College move toward the day when the mystery of sexual identity is celebrated in all its beauty and variety.

Several individuals deserve special thanks for their roles in bringing this volume to completion. The singular vision, compassion, and courage of Kim McElaney, former Director of the Office of College Chaplains (1992-2010) underlie many of the changes described in these pages. The idea for this project came from Prof. Nancy Andrews of the Classics Department and, at the time, Director of the College Honors Program. Prof. Richard E. Matlak (Director of the Center for Interdisciplinary and Special Studies, 2000-2013) and Prof. Theresa McBride (Director of Women’s and Gender Studies, 1996-1998 and 2009-2011) both greeted this project with enthusiasm and made publication of the first edition possible. Prof. Susan Cunningham (Associate Director of the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies), Prof. Stephanie Yuhl (History), Amit Taneja (Associate Provost for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion), Molly Heidemann (Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion), and Tom Cadigan ‘02 (Alumni Relations) all provided generous assistance with this expanded version. Robert D. McCleary offered valuable editorial

assistance and designed the covers for both the original and the expanded editions of this book. Besides her inspiration, Marybeth Kearns-Barrett, current Director of the Office of College Chaplains, and the person to whom this book is dedicated, provided important historical information. Finally, this edition would not have been possible without the whole-hearted support and hard work of Associate Chaplain Megan Fox-Kelly. To all of these people the authors and I are deeply indebted.

James B. Nickoloff

Associate Professor Emeritus of Religious Studies

August 2019



## A FRAUD

By Richard Carlstrom ('78)

“He that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him.”

I John 4:16

Growing up, I'd heard that plenty of times from the pulpit. Yet in my young adult life, the very church that infused that loving sentiment in me also caused me to doubt that it was entirely true. Sure, maybe for *you* it was true, yet not for someone like me. A “homosexual.” Worse – a Catholic homosexual. Confirmation of my doubt and fear came with this declaration of sexual ethics from the Vatican in my college freshman year: “Homosexual acts are *intrinsically disordered* and *can in no case be approved of*” (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “*Persona Humana: Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics*” VIII, 1975; emphasis added).

Essentially, I had two belief systems operating in my life: one belief system characterized by all the profound love and acceptance that Christ offered me and the other belief system that assured me I was going to hell--no matter how rigorously I followed all of the Commandments and all other teachings of Christ. I was essentially doomed.

You can imagine my confused state of mind during my freshman year with those words of condemnation echoing in my head. Yet it was easy for me to believe that homosexuality was an intrinsic “moral evil” because it aligned with all the other Catholic tenets that had been promulgated since I was 6 years old in catechism class. All those dreaded Sunday morning lessons before church combined with dinner table discussions informed me that though we worshipped a loving and forgiving God, the grave sins of divorce, pre-marital sex, adultery, eating meat on Friday (!), and homosexuality were all given equal measure as far as this young man could tell. Each of these moral evils would invoke the wrath of God and condemn one to eternal hell.

So, in September of 1974, it was inconceivable for me to think that I would ever be writing an autobiographical chapter in a book titled *In, Out and About On The Hill: Lesbian and Gay Alums Reflect on Life at Holy Cross*--the second edition, no less! At that time, my *belief system* about all things Catholic, and certainly about being a *gay* Catholic, indicated that the terms “gay” and “Catholic” were mutually exclusive. Period. Any Catholic adult in 1974 likely held this belief as well.

As a gay young man in the “Dark Ages” of Catholic college culture, I had a wealth of experience that told me a gay student was not going to be welcome at a Catholic college. And yet, here I am--Catholic and gay and I've lived to tell about it! Somehow, in the last 10-15 years, I have felt comfortable enough to introduce my husband to two of the College's presidents (Fr. McFarland and Fr. Boroughs), to have

dinner together with them and to be authentic in their company. That is astounding to me! How did I go from feeling like a complete pariah in this Catholic context to feeling that maybe I, too, belong here? Over time, something uniquely loving, accepting and open-minded about the Holy Cross community eventually chipped away at my protective shell. Some combination of faith, the kindness of a few alumni friends and the Spirit of Christ speaking to me through Fr. McFarland and Fr. Boroughs made this journey toward my more authentic self possible.

What a long and tortured journey it has been, however.

Born and raised in Connecticut to a Swedish Protestant father and an Irish Catholic mother, we observed my father's family's non-religious Swedish traditions which included foods and fully embraced the Irish Catholic religious observances while thankfully ignoring the corned beef and cabbage. I did not go to a Catholic school until college. Yet I had the full benefit of Catholic teaching, catechism classes, the Latin Mass and all the usual Catholic rituals.

Both my mother's and father's parents, as well as my father's *grand*parents and some aunts and uncles lived within a few miles of our home. There were weekly dinners together, the four generations of our family gathered around the dining room table. Mixed in with the dinner conversation was a sprinkling of religious dogma, gossipy opinions about the moral behavior of others and the sinfulness of such behavior. And while no one in my family was a Bible thumper, I gleaned enough from those conversations over the years to know that something about me, my personality and interests, and the way I looked too long at handsome boys was going to lead me straight to hell.

Sin and the fear of punishment in the now and hereafter were a constant shadow on the landscape of my childhood, which I suppose is true for all youngsters growing up in a Catholic home no matter what the sin may be. By the time I was high school age, I could not tell which sin of mine was worse: the masturbation, the lusty homosexual thoughts, or eating the hamburger instead of the tuna fish in school at lunch on Friday during Lent. My Catholic beliefs had been pounded into me. Yet my sin--the sin of homosexuality--could not easily be cleansed with a few Hail Mary's after Confession. Absolution would require a wholesale rejection of my very being. But I could no sooner change my attraction to men than I could change my eye color from blue to brown. I had no choice in this matter of sexuality. I knew this deep down, even at a young age. Yet people of authority seemed to think I did have a choice.

I could not completely hide who I was, try as I might. As early as 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> grade I was pegged as a "fairy" by being a well-behaved, studious teacher's pet, disdainful of all sports except competitive swimming and diving, and one who always gravitated toward playing with the girls rather than the boys. Often enough, I was verbally bullied by the boys who could easily sniff out the oddballs like me. I often felt ostracized and always felt my "otherness." On the whole, I was not popular in school, and I was accepted only by others who were also some variation of "other."

This feeling of separateness continued throughout grammar and junior high school. Things began to change a bit in my junior and senior years of high school. By then, I had learned how to adapt to my

immediate social circumstances. Out of a sense of social survival, I became a chameleon of sorts. Whenever I (or others) was verbally bullied, I learned to pay attention to the words, actions and mannerisms that seemed to instigate the bullying. Like a sailor, I would then make a mental note to course-correct and adjust for prevailing winds. Of necessity, I adapted new behaviors based on how to avoid these bullying experiences. My dialogue, tone of voice, manner of dressing, topics discussed and physical posturing became more and more “masculine” by design. I’d be *anyone* I needed to be in order to survive the circumstances. I learned that **inauthenticity served me well**.

Part of this behavior modification included dating girls in high school. I was on the swimming and diving team throughout high school, and I learned how important it was to (try to) put up the machismo front to stay out of trouble with the guys on the team. Locker room talk was all about girls and sex. So, like all the other kids in high school, I dated girls. In retrospect, I can now see that each of these girls too were “other” in some way. They were never the cheerleaders but rather the female nerds that I knew well from my AP classes. Any date I had with a girl allowed me to honestly talk the locker room talk after swim practice. Yet my locker room talk was lame. It was as if Mr. Rogers tried to speak like a rapper. In some ways, I took as much crap for pretending to be straight as I did for being suspected of being gay. Still, to me, it was better than living with the label “gay.”

When applying to colleges, I sensed that going to a Catholic college would be a bad idea. There would surely be no tolerance for a gay guy at a Catholic school. I was certain that a liberal place like Yale (my first choice) would be far more accepting. There I could fit into the multi-colored mosaic of students and would not have to hide. In fact, from what I surmised, I would be accepted in certain circles on campus rather than be ostracized for being gay. Well, Yale did not accept me, so this became a moot point. Holy Cross was the college that several men in my mother’s family attended and “The Cross” was the clear choice as far as my family was concerned. Instead of blending in in New Haven, I would be hiding in Worcester for the next four years. Oh, boy!

That September day in 1974 when I arrived at Holy Cross College and walked into my Carlin I dorm, I was *not* excited to be starting college at that beautiful school. I was rather terrified, actually, and doing all I could to disguise the fact.

Not only was there no gay rainbow flag evident anywhere on Carlin I, heterosexuality and machismo were palpable. Guys were shouting during an impromptu game of hockey in the hall complete with sticks and a tennis ball; lacrosse sticks and baseball gloves were seen here and there in the rooms. The dialogue in the hall was a bit locker room style at times. The music coming from the guys’ stereos was decidedly rock & roll. How will my love of pop music and gay icons like Cher, Bette Midler and The Pointer Sisters be tolerated in this environment?! Knowing who I was--what I was--felt like the skunk that wandered into the garden party. *Nothing* about the school and the students I observed indicated that I could be “odd” in any way and still be accepted by what was a heterosexist culture and very Catholic student body.



So, far from being excited with anticipation, I was consumed with one thought: “How the hell am I going to get through this undetected and unscathed? **I’m a complete fraud.** I can’t possibly be myself here. I can’t ever reveal the secret that I’ve been closely protecting for these last 10 years or so. Making matters worse, I can’t hide anywhere here! I have no privacy whatsoever. I’m sharing a room with some stranger. I’m showering with 30 of these guys daily. When will they all discover that I’m ‘a fag’--that I am trying to pull one over on them as a ‘straight’ guy? When will the public shaming and the hazing begin?”

I was aware then and clear about it now that an 18 year-old student should not have to weigh every decision, every move, every word chosen with a deep-seated fear behind it. Dread stood constantly on the threshold of my existence. High school was like this, so what was the difference now? My high school was not Catholic. I was now about to compound my worries about being a young gay man with the fear of being admonished by the Catholic community for being the “morally evil” person the Church declared people like me to be. Instead of feeling that I would thrive at Holy Cross, I concerned myself with surviving Holy Cross.

At Yale, I could have walked into the gay student union (formed in 1969 on that campus), met kindred spirits, and asked them to walk me through these fears. There was no such place to go to at Holy Cross in 1974.

On top of the overt heterosexism I observed on campus, this first semester of freshman year introduced a new complication: I fell in love. With a straight guy. Let that sink in for a minute!

I don’t mean I became infatuated with or just sexually attracted to this guy. No, I was hit by something like a lightning bolt that I had not *ever* felt before. This guy was handsome to be sure, yet he was also a brilliant thinker, a spiritual quester and a great personality. Intellectually mature well beyond his 18 years, he was deep. Far from superficial, or even just book-smart, no one in my life had ever pondered big spiritual and existential questions as this guy did. He was intense, disciplined and focused. I was the polar opposite. And I was thunderstruck.

Due to the influence of his intellect and spiritual curiosity, a benefit of this unrequited love was a budding sense of my spiritual life--as opposed to religious life—that began to take root. My friend quickly introduced me to books he was reading by thinkers like Alan Watts, Hermann Hesse and others who drew from a broader spiritual spectrum than just Christianity. The spiritual messages within these books grabbed me and shook me. Each had a profound impact on me with its guideposts about finding one’s self and seeking a deeper connection with life and one’s spiritual core. Further, the main characters were young men, and those men had profound and emotional relationships with each other. I was transfixed by these characters and their quests. So here I am at a Catholic college and now becoming genuinely interested in a spiritual life, not through Catholic teachings but through other modalities.

While I did not take the course The Theology of Liberation at Holy Cross (which was very new in 1975 or ’76), my best friend/love interest did. He spoke passionately about that class and his deepening desire to help the underdog: “to be for others.” Forty years later, I see that the deep respect and appreciation I have for Holy Cross’ mission of educating “men and women for others” began as a seed planted indirectly

through liberation theology, and I listened to that message because I was in love with someone who was in love with that conviction.

Never having had the intensity of feeling for someone in my life that I found myself tormented by now, I had no idea what to do. I became obsessed with this friend, yet I knew that this was a hopeless situation for me. This straight guy was never going to be anything other than a friend to me. And as close as we quickly became, I felt completely alone. I had absolutely no one to talk to about this. Who at home or at this Catholic school would be willing to listen to me talk about my love for a guy, and much less a straight guy? I listened to plenty of female friends talk about their crushes and I heard countless stories from guys about their pursuit of a woman. No one would tolerate my “love story,” that much was certain. And in order to keep my passion for this guy a secret, I worked extra hard at maintaining a heterosexual front.

By the Spring of freshman year, I was introduced to alcohol. Until then, I had never had so much as one hit of marijuana or a single beer. I quickly discovered that copious amounts of the stuff made dealing with my constant state of confusion and fear tolerable--at least when drunk. Having added the fuel of alcohol to the fire of my demoralization, my own self-discipline began to erode. There were hangovers, missed classes, falling grades. I eventually sought help.

The spiritual help that some students relied on felt off-limits to me. After all, I was a sinner, a deviant in the eyes of the church. If anything, I should be praying to be cured of my sexuality, not looking for spiritual paths to help me enjoy a life as a gay Catholic. No amount of church-going or chats with clergy was going to offer me hope for salvation or a blessing of any sort.

Instead, I went to the Counseling Center in Hogan. I met with a female counselor on the first visit or two. As the discussion of sexuality began to pepper my dialogue with increasing honesty on my part, her discomfort with the subject caused her to introduce me to her male associate. This did not go well. After one, maybe two visits with him, he quickly became irritated with my talk of my sexuality and how I was falling apart in not knowing how to deal with the love I had for this straight man. It was very clear that this particular counselor would not have been comfortable coaching me on how to handle my love for another *gay* man--yet a *straight* man? Forget about it! In fairness to him, how was he supposed to guide a student at a Catholic college through this morally “evil” mess? It was like asking him to ferry me across the River Styx to Hades--which is where he probably thought I was headed. In the middle of one session, he actually yelled at me, told me to leave his office, to get back to my studies, forget this nonsense and get over this. He did not direct me to the gay student union.

Now what? I had to keep my feelings for my love interest completely to myself and I desperately wanted to fit in somewhere--anywhere--on this campus. I did not want to be alone without friends. So I got involved in choir and The Paks of Holy Cross, the male a capella vocal group.

At the first rehearsals for The Paks, I intuited that at least five of the twelve guys, myself included, were gay. “Maybe there’s hope!” I thought. I quickly became fast friends with the four other guys. And as

clearly as these guys were gay in *my* estimation, none of them ever said so. They each had a girlfriend on campus or at home, yet I knew they were gay. I did not let my guard down either. In fact, not once in all four years on The Hill together did one of us admit to the other that we were gay. Not once! As ludicrous as that seems, in the context of that 1974-78 very Catholic environment, it makes perfect sense to me that none of us would risk the consequences of such honesty. Clearly, we each understood that in order to fit into campus life and participate in all of the social events like Spring Ball and the like, you could not do so as single guys. Girlfriends were required. I suppose that there were studious straight guys who managed to have a good time at college without having a girlfriend. Like my roommate, they were focused on studies, a bright future, and that was enough. Not so for me.

I determined that the only chance I had for a broader social survival on campus would be to grossly overcompensate for being gay by behaving as straight as I could, which would have to include aggressively pursuing and dating women. This survival method worked moderately well in high school. The kids in my AP Humanities track were less discerning on that score, though the jocks never bought it for a minute. But compared to high school, the stakes at college seemed higher in terms of sexuality, dating and the norms around all that. I did not imagine that I could pretend to be straight without actually having sex. So I went 180 degrees in the opposite direction from my relatively inexperienced gay sex life to one of promiscuous hetero gay sex on campus. I was out to prove a point.

To pull off this daily charade meant that I resorted to lying about much of my life. The cover-up began and continued through all four years--and beyond. Nothing about me was authentic. I hid as deeply as I could in this straight-acting charade. I lied to my four gay friends (who allegedly weren't "gay") just as I did to everyone on campus. I was deceiving women by leading them on in confusing dating games of cat and mouse, sleeping with some, and eventually hurting the feelings of each of them.

Adding to the trouble that my behavior as a con artist created, I found myself in a maelstrom of multiple sins and feelings of guilt and despair at times. All of this turmoil arose simply because I was certain that I could never just be myself at this Catholic college. Being gay here would be like bringing a pot roast to the vegetarian picnic.

Yet I did make it through. And while I got sober 4 years after graduation, my acceptance of myself as a gay Catholic man is still a work in progress. Old beliefs die hard.

I met a magnificent human being who became my *de facto* husband in late 1994. And though Joel and I have been blissfully together for 25 years now--the last 6 of them officially married--I have never brought him to a Holy Cross alumni gathering in San Francisco (where I live) or in Worcester. That Catholic sense of shame that I assume I would feel when confronted with alumni friends and acquaintances from 40 years ago has not entirely left me. I have never attended a class reunion except for my 5<sup>th</sup> which I attended with a woman who was still one of my campus girlfriends back in '76-'78. Being there with her as my cover made it all right for me. Years later, I would continue the act of fraud as I could not muster the courage to introduce my "husband" to Holy Cross folk without fear of contempt. Even in liberal San Francisco where any other college's alumni would surely think that being gay was perfectly fine in 2019, I have assumed that my *Catholic* alumni associates would have some disdain for the fact.



Author David Foster Wallace said that, “*Everything I ever let go of has claw marks on it.*” This is very true for me. I find that in several pockets of my thinking, there are certain ideas I have come to hold as true and behaviors or habits I have molded around those “truths” for decades. Operating on assumptions of fact, I had never examined their veracity. As political comedian Bill Maher often jokes: “I don’t know it for a fact; I just know it’s true.”

My Catholic upbringing certainly adheres to that thinking. There are claw marks on old Catholic ideas that I have invested in, accepted on blind faith as truth, and never moved on from since childhood in some cases. Things like limbo and purgatory. What ever happened to them?! Limbo and purgatory are not things that I know exist for a fact. . . I just know that they’re true. Because the Church insisted they were true. Who am I to question?

Thus I was shocked and even a bit perturbed to learn a few years ago that the Catholic Church dropped its position around this 900 year-old belief. I used the term “purgatory” *daily* since 1967 in a prayer that I memorized when my maternal grandfather died. “*Oh, gentlest heart of Jesus, ever-present in the blessed sacrament, ever-consumed with burning love for the poor captive souls in purgatory, have mercy on the soul of the departed servant (fill in the name here...).*”

Wait a minute! Waddaya mean purgatory is no longer a thing?! When did this happen? When was anyone going to tell me?! Well, it turns out that I was misinformed, and it was limbo--not purgatory--that became de-commissioned, so to speak, as a Catholic tenet of belief. I was relieved. I now did not have to alter the Prayer for the Dead and memorize it anew with the word “purgatory” excised.

So, I have to ask: Could this willingness to change a centuries-old belief in limbo and purgatory apply to Catholic teaching on homosexuality? Is it possible that the Church is just wrong about that?--that LGBTQ people are not intrinsically disordered and their sexual lives morally evil? If Catholics are no longer required to eat tuna fish casserole on Friday nights to avoid banishment to hell, perhaps the Church would reconsider gay love and sex.

For the past few years, I have been actively challenging my belief systems, in both my business life and my personal life. A business coach pointed out to me that I was still clinging to a belief system about some business practices that no longer served me well. Just because a way of thinking served me at the start of my career does not necessarily mean that it is good for me today. In fact, those old beliefs may be harming me, halting my growth in business.

I was recently confronted with some old “beliefs” as I packed hundreds of boxes of things to be moved to a new home. Desk drawers, kitchen cabinets--and especially the garage--presented many dozens of opportunities for me to see that even though rational thought accepted the fact that I have never once used that gadget I received as a gift 20 years ago, I could not possibly let that item go to Good Will. “It’s still brand new in the box and I *might* need that some day!” I would insist to my husband.

Has this “keep it or toss it?” dilemma plagued any of you who are reading this from time to time? If you are like me, you may occasionally cling to things that you invest in one way or another. Beliefs can be like that, like investments we made long ago that no longer pay the dividends they used to. In time, I will eventually let go of that item or belief, yet it will have my deep claw marks on it when it is pried from my hands!

In 2000 I had a shocking experience that shook my belief system when Ana Alvarado of the Holy Cross Development Department called on me at my office in California one day. Her job was to solicit donations from alumni and to re-engage those of us who had fallen far off the college’s radar. Ana gave me her whole-hearted, highly enthusiastic pitch as to why I should reconnect with Holy Cross which I had not done since my 5<sup>th</sup> year reunion in 1983. Ana was--and still is--an irresistible personality. I have rarely encountered anyone as enthusiastic about any topic as Ana is about Holy Cross. I found myself wanting to buy the elixir she was selling--yet I wouldn’t.

“Ana, I love what I am hearing, yet I don’t know that there will ever be a welcome mat for me at Holy Cross. Frankly, I’m gay and I cannot imagine that gays will ever be welcomed into the fold at a Catholic college. Thanks anyway, for calling on me and bringing me up to date on all the great things that Holy Cross is doing lately.”

What Ana said next knocked me over like a wrecking ball. “Richard, you are wrong about that! Holy Cross now has a gay and lesbian student organization on campus. Things have changed a lot since you were at The Cross.”

“WOW!” I was flabbergasted. And once again, though skeptical, I left claw marks on the box carrying my old ideas--these “facts” about Holy Cross and Catholic dogma that I had not thought to question since 1978. Yet even though Ana made me aware that some recognition (and acceptance) of gay students existed on campus, I did not believe that the College would fully embrace gay students or alumni as wholly acceptable. I felt that I would still be stigmatized as a gay *Catholic* person, one who was counter to the religious tenets of Catholic alums and current administrators. In other words, while the College might have a modern position of *tolerance*, I never assumed that there would be a bona fide embrace of gay students and alumni, a true holistic acceptance.

Nonetheless, thanks to Ana Alvarado, who shook my rigid belief that gay students would never, ever be welcomed at a Catholic college, I became very involved with Holy Cross in 2000, and I have remained very enthusiastic and committed to promoting the College’s ideals and mission to anyone who will listen.

So, what have I learned as a result of my experience as a struggling gay student at Holy Cross and my years as a gay Catholic since graduation? How do I reconcile that time of trauma with where I am today? How has Holy Cross somehow remained precious to me after all that?

For this talking dinosaur, it is a matter of progress, not perfection as they say in recovery circles. I still have a lot of growing to do.

While I eventually became very involved in Holy Cross alumni affairs in the San Francisco area, I am not proud of the fact that almost no one in that Holy Cross community knows that I am gay, except for Fr. Boroughs. I still am prey to a reflexive emotional notion that revealing my authentic gay self to fellow Catholic alums would be met with silent disdain, not a warm accepting embrace. When your guard is trained to be up at all times since early years of being shamed for being gay, you don't let your defenses down too easily. Regrettably, I have extended this fraudulent behavior, the wearing of a mask, throughout my entire adult life--right up through this very moment in certain corners of my life. For instance, I still have not brought my husband to a Holy Cross alumni reception and very few of my clients and business associates know that I am married to Joel. I have an enviable and fantastic marriage, yet fear tells me to keep this fact to myself.

Nevertheless, due to the fact that Ana Alvarado reunited me with Holy Cross, I continue to become more and more impressed with the College, its students and faculty, with every article I read in *Holy Cross Magazine*, with every encounter I have with HC students from the Bay Area and the administrators I meet through alumni activities. Knowing what I now know about Holy Cross as it lives its mission today, I would jump at the chance to attend college there now. In spite of the difficult time I had there as a young gay man, I have been transformed for the better by my re-engagement with Holy Cross. The spiritual roots that were planted in me at The Cross in 1974 have only deepened over time. I can only imagine that a young LGBTQ student at Holy Cross today would have a remarkably easier, more welcoming and accepting experience on The Hill than I did in the gay Dark Ages of the mid-70s.



## FINDING COURAGE WITH TIME

By Ellen Keohane ('83)

In February 2018, I participated in a panel discussion of alumni returning to the Holy Cross campus to talk with students about how I experience faith and spirituality as a lesbian. Specifically, we answered the question: *How have my spirituality and faith been sources of growth, self-acceptance, and self-love or how have they been obstacles?* For me, I didn't have to make a trip back to Mt. St. James for the event, like the other panelists, because I never left! While I thought I was leaving Holy Cross on Commencement Day, 1983, I soon returned, hired by Fr. Joe Pomeroy, S.J., for a position in the Data Processing Center. Now, 36 years later, I am still here as the Chief Information Officer at the College and from this vantage point I can answer the question put to the panel: Holy Cross has both supported me in my journey and was an obstacle.

The panel was a pleasure. I'm always impressed when people share their stories and my co-panelists told of very different paths towards self-understanding, self-acceptance, and importantly, self-love. The role Holy Cross played in our journeys was significant for each of us. These fellow alumni were brave, I was to hear--much braver than I was. I was older than the other panelists by 10 to 35 years, and so my experiences differed from theirs. Yet we all had to face our own truth, in our own ways and on our own time.

Also, in reading the first edition of *In, Out, and About on the Hill*, I learned of more bravery from my fellow alumni contributors. Particularly compelling and heart-wrenching were the stories of those who came out as gay men during the AIDS epidemic of the 80s and early 90s. I vividly remember people, some very close to me, saying the most hateful things about gay people, particularly gay men. It was definitely not a safe time to come out. Fear was real and it brought out hatred.

I was at Holy Cross, as a student or an employee, during the time each of the panelists from last February and also all the contributors to the first edition of this book spoke about (1980-2017). I've witnessed the College's progress over the decades first-hand. There has been significant progress, thanks in large part to these people and colleagues in the Chaplains' office, such as Kim McElaney ('76), Marybeth Kearns-Barrett ('84), and Megan Fox-Kelly ('99). While I admit I'm tempted to say to those who might complain now about the climate that "it's nothing compared to the 80's," that's really not what I believe when I think about it. We should learn from the past but that does not mean no more change is needed.

### My Spirituality and Faith Journey

My spirituality and faith have been a tremendous source of growth, self-acceptance, and self-love throughout my life, because spirituality and faith for me are inner resources. I grew in self-love because I knew, through my faith, that God loves me. If God loves me, then I can love and accept myself. But to truly grow in my faith, I have found takes courage. I slowly found the

courage to grow into an authentic life. God's love was the foundation, or starting point, for all of it. Inwardly, I've never doubted it. Externally, however, it's been a bit more of an up and down journey, because of my relationship to the Church.

Let me start at the beginning. I was born in 1961, so I grew up in the 60's and 70's. I was raised Catholic, in a large Irish Catholic family. I'm one of six children. Church was an important part of my life in my early years and a source of self-acceptance and self-love. I loved going to church (perhaps if only because the peace and quiet were a break from a hectic household). I felt part of a community. I'm old enough to remember Latin Masses, girls/women wearing hats, and the church packed full with five services per weekend. It was "community" and I was part of it.

I graduated from high school in 1979 and Holy Cross in 1983. So in my 20's I was trying to figure out the direction of my life, during the late 1970's and throughout the 1980's. As I moved through college, and started questioning my sexual orientation, I faced a number of obstacles, not the least of which was the Catholic Church, which shifted from being a source of acceptance and community to a source of insecurity. Being a student at Holy Cross, versus a non-religious institution of higher education, didn't help in that regard either.

The biggest obstacle, at least for me, was that back then there were no role models to whom I could look. It seemed all the messages were negative stereotypes or vicious and hurtful jokes about "queers" or "fags". Back then there was nothing positive. In the late 70's/early 80's "lesbian" meant "butch," which didn't fit me. Butch girls/women were very visible-- generally wearing short hair and maybe men's clothing. I didn't want to be that, and I didn't want what would happen to me if I was that. You had to be really brave to be butch and out. You would suffer for it. To be true to yourself meant a lot of ridicule and rejection. I was not brave.

## At Holy Cross

Near the end of my freshman year, a friendship turned romantic. This was my first such relationship and neither of us thought it meant anything about our sexuality-- or so I said. I was kidding myself. I went home that summer before sophomore year to a best friend who launched into a continual tirade against a couple of our high school teammates who had recently come out. While it was a classic case of "methinks thou dost protest too much," since she would finally admit to being gay a couple of years later, it was a preview to me of what I faced if I were to admit that I too was gay. I was not brave enough. So I did not admit it to myself. When I returned to campus that fall, I pushed away from my special freshman friend, without any explanation. (I still feel badly about that, and the lame apology I gave her years later was graciously accepted. I didn't deserve it.) Soon, however, I developed another crush on a "straight" girl that was clearly more than a crush. I fell in love and suffered my first broken heart. Looking back, I wonder how I could have fooled myself at the time and for the next half dozen years after graduation, pretending that this was something outside of who I really was. But I can see now that it was because I had no one to look to to tell me that this was a real and true aspect of who I might be. I had no role models who seemed like me, and there was no

information or support structures. And I wasn't brave enough. It has only been with the passage of many years that I can see it somewhat clearly.

For example, on the campus during my time, there were no obviously gay women. I didn't think there were any at Holy Cross. There was no one you would call "butch" (unlike at my high school). The closest I came was one time taking a walk on campus by myself and stumbling upon two women sitting on a bench, a little too closely, in a remote part of campus. They moved apart as I walked by. Imagine that being the only hint of lesbians on a campus in four years' time?

Thinking about all of this makes me appreciate so much more the impact of the creation of Allies, Abigale, Pride, and other groups at Holy Cross. The College has moved from having a confidential weekly meeting of LGBTQ allies to today's out-in-the-open Pride and Outfront groups. There were some brave people along the way, such as Marybeth Kearns-Barrett, Jeannie Seidler ('96) and Nan O'Connor ('84) who made a big difference, as their stories in this book make clear. I met Jeannie Seidler years later, and she told me the story of her "coming out speech." I remember hardly comprehending the bravery. She herself said she couldn't believe she did it in such grand fashion, coming out in front of an audience of hundreds of fellow students gathered in the Hogan Ballroom! I admire Jeannie and the other students, along with the faculty and staff who supported them, in putting truth over fear. Jeannie and I were among the crowd outside Cambridge City Hall at midnight on May 17, 2004 when same-sex marriage became legal in Massachusetts. I'll never forget the excitement and celebration.

Why am I so focused on bravery? Because it's hard to imagine the risk people took coming out in the 70's or 80's or earlier. Still today coming out is risky. Aristotle described courage as the mean between rashness and cowardice. A brave person faces and fears the right things, in the right way, at the right time. And once something is said, you cannot unsay it. That was always in my mind. If you told someone you were gay and they didn't react well, it was too late to take it back. Coming out in my time usually meant loss, not gain. Being gay meant loss. A loss of family: not mine, thankfully, but friends of mine lost relationships with fathers, mothers, siblings, nieces/nephews. A loss of friends: I lost some, for no other reason than being gay. A loss of being married or having kids: those weren't really options back then. Only the bravest among us risked these losses, and I wasn't one of them.

And the Church told me, in different ways, that I would suffer from a loss of God's love because of this. Thankfully, my inner voice never said the same. But I did lose my Church. I chose to leave the Catholic Church in 1998 and went to the Episcopal Church. I was looking for acceptance, when all I was getting in the Catholic Church was tolerance. Being *tolerated* is very unsatisfying.

Speaking as an employee of the College, I can say that being gay could also mean a loss of power or standing, at work or in the community. Because of this "flaw," you might have less chance for advancement. I'll admit I didn't speak openly about myself to co-workers until after I got the top job in the IT department at Holy Cross. Did I think it would count against me? Perhaps. It depended on who was in leadership. Michael McFarland, S.J., president of Holy Cross from 2000 to 2012, showed real leadership in my view, and I reported directly to him as



Massachusetts laws were changing to recognize gay marriage back in 2004. To me, he was putting Holy Cross on the right side of history, by ensuring the College followed the laws of the Commonwealth and not using his position as a platform to fight against it. This was unlike presidents at other Jesuit institutions. I never once experienced anything but support from my colleagues at Holy Cross. I was luckier than some, I'm sure. I'm now very out at the College, including being an active member of the *Outfront* affinity group for GLBTQ faculty and staff.

It's only in the past few years that I have stopped all the dancing around with pronouns with colleagues when conversations turned personal. I did that for so long. You get good at it--and it's fake. Both with the changing times and with age came my ability to speak more genuinely and truthfully, such as by writing a chapter for this book! I've learned that people, especially on the HC campus and in the Northeast US, don't particularly care about your sexual orientation. I know that's not the case elsewhere and I continue to bump up against prejudice, especially as I travel outside of the Northeast. But that doesn't stop me anymore. I now feel an obligation to speak truthfully and understand how important it is to show others--current HC students or my nieces and nephews or anyone who might be questioning themselves-- that there are people who have traveled a journey like the one they are on and that they are perfect the way they are. As I've made it to the senior ranks of the College, as CIO and member of the Cabinet, it's all the more important to show that I'm there. I need to be part of the Outfront group and be visible. I didn't have any such role model during my time as a Holy Cross student.

And Today...

I got married in August 2017, and as fate would have it, my wife is a Holy Cross graduate too! Sara Smithson graduated in 1984, though we did not know each other back then. That magical alumni network! We got married in an Episcopal church, before God. It was all blessing and love. My father (age 89) and my mother walked me down the aisle, and then Sara, the most beautiful woman I've ever seen, followed with her father and step-mom. Family and friends, including many Holy Cross alumni and my HC colleagues, shared the day in celebration. Sara and I were able to receive the sacrament of matrimony, something I never thought would be possible. Being married has been wonderful. We are blessed to have family, friends, neighbors and strangers all accept that we are legally married and treat us as they would any couple.

With Courage Comes Change

It's only recently that I've really understood the power of the saying "out and proud." Change can't happen from the shadows. Today's young people are fortunate to have so many role models and support structures, made possible by the "out and proud" people who preceded them. But clearly there's more to be done.

Recent events at Holy Cross have shown me that I'd be wrong to say "you guys don't know how easy you have it, and so you should be glad with how far we've come and accept it as 'good' or 'finished.'" We reflect on how far we've come not only to appreciate the bravery of those who paved the way, despite much abuse and ridicule, but to inspire us to move forward

even more. I think often of the words of Brother Geoffrey Tristram of the Society of St. John the Evangelist, who said, *“It is good to reflect on where we have been, to give thanks for all those who have supported us, challenged us, encouraged us and loved us into becoming who we are now. But we look back, with thanksgiving, in order to look forward. We cannot stand still. God is always calling us on to larger life.”*

As I write, the College is struggling once again with how to respond to anti-LGBTQIA+ incidents as well as very serious cases of faculty sexual misconduct. Together they have rocked us as an institution and shaken our confidence in our ability to properly respond as a Jesuit and Catholic institution. I see real leadership and I see leadership that has missed the target, in my view. Some clearly don’t know how to treat another with whom you don’t agree. Students are showing the rest of us how to speak up forcefully but respectfully (with a couple of regrettable exceptions). I know that we will get through this-- stronger though unfortunately with much hurt in our community. I hope that at least if it’s out in the light, it can be dealt with. “Only light can drive out darkness,” said Dr. Martin Luther King. I pray that we get through this soon.

## Closing

My Catholic faith, the Catholic Church, and the HC campus in the early 1980’s were all factors in making me afraid to face the truth about my sexuality, let alone live authentically into it. But my family never faltered in their support. I am fortunate to have found a home in the Episcopal church where I am not just tolerated but celebrated and appreciated. I married my wife in the Church and now also have an in-law family and all the joy of a marriage. While I no longer feel welcome in the Catholic Church, I am embraced and supported by the community at Holy Cross-- especially as I’ve become more open and allowed myself to be embraced. I still participate in the spiritual programming from the Chaplains’ office, including occasional noontime masses. I am out and proud and in communion with so many others who live the College mission that requires everyone to “acknowledge and respect differences” and to “make the best of their own talents, to work together, to be sensitive to one another, to serve others, and to seek justice within and beyond the Holy Cross community.” I am proud of how far the College has come and do not doubt that it will continue to support all within its community. I feel blessed to have spent so many years of my life at Holy Cross, both as a student and employee, and am thankful for all who have loved me along the way.

## BE NOT AFRAID

By Carmine Salvucci ('84)

I doubt there are many people who get lost on their way to moving in to the college of their choice...especially when it's just 52 miles from home. But maybe that gives you an idea of where this will all be coming from, literally and figuratively.

If it weren't so urban, I could probably characterize my growing up in Brighton, Massachusetts as about as provincial as growing up on a farm in Iowa. I couldn't tell you if my aunt and uncle, who lived 11 miles away, lived north, south, east or west of me (they were the "really far away" relatives), nor could I find their house unless I started from MY house and drove exactly the way my father drove the four or five times a year we actually ventured that far. Growing up, everyone and everything I needed was pretty much within a 5 mile radius.

Both my parents' families were from the same, small village in Italy and for whatever reason, most of the people of San Donato settled in the same part of Boston called Brighton. I grew up the youngest of four, and the only one who seemed to actually enjoy school. Seeing the opportunity, my parents decided to enroll me in the private, catholic, boys' school where my mother worked as one of two "lunch ladies," and the school was generous enough to offer us a scholarship to make it affordable. From 7<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade, thanks to a reasonable amount of gray matter, financial aid, and an outgoing personality, I made terrific friends and managed to excel academically in my class of 42 boys. By the time senior year rolled around, I followed in my classmates' footsteps and without really chatting with my parents, and without really knowing if we could afford it, I became the first in my near or extended family to begin the college search.

I remember my first visit to Holy Cross. I drove up to Worcester with a few friends from St. Sebastian's and we all had interview appointments. I remember waiting for my friends on the porch of Fenwick Hall – on a rainy, cold Worcester day – and thinking "This is where I want to go to college." I did my best in my interview with Jim Halpin, long-time director of admissions, and decided that day to apply early decision. And on December 7, 1979, my mother called me at my part-time job as a drive-up bank teller to read me my acceptance letter.

Even though I went to an all boys' high school, that doesn't mean there weren't "all girls" on my mind at that time. The local Catholic parish school was all girls – Our Lady of the Presentation – and I enjoyed a very close group of girl "friends" from there whom I had met through CYO. And it only seemed right and good to introduce my group of *boy* friends from St. Sebastian's to these nice, Catholic girl friends to provide what seemed like a perfectly acceptable supply of semi-formal and prom dates to carry us through to high school graduation.

But even as I “boogie-fevered” my way through high school with my tight group of friends – dating girls and experimenting sexually more than any good Catholic boy should – even then I knew something about me was different. From an early age I remember pulling the color circulars from the Sunday Globe and thumbing through to find the Jordan Marsh ads featuring men clad in only their tighty-whities. And I remember at age 11 or 12, sneaking into my uncle’s room and looking under his bed at his dirty magazine collection, paying far more attention to the men in the photos than the women. And while I dated girls in high school, I can now look back and without a doubt identify my first crush on a man. I didn’t know it was a crush then – then he was just my “best friend.” But I remember not wanting to spend a minute apart and being devastated when he couldn’t do something together on the weekends. Or worse, when he was doing something with someone other than me on the weekends.

So while I have plenty of memories of thinking about and being attracted to men – even from an early age – I don’t have a lot of memories of an internal struggle as I tried to come to terms with these “impure thoughts.” I guess this was because admitting to myself that I was gay was so absolutely, positively out of the question. First of all, I didn’t really know anyone gay (my single uncle was just a lifelong bachelor...right?). Second of all, admitting it to myself or others would have been completely unacceptable in the eyes of God, my friends, and my entire Italian-Catholic family (I heard how everyone talked about my flamboyant, very out-of-the-closet distant cousin). And so even though I might have occasionally been a little confused during my high school years, I focused on having a good time in a most-traditional way – dating my girlfriends, being social, achieving academically and staying close enough to my male friends to make it all work without anyone really noticing...or so I hoped.

Once my parents and I figured out how we would pay for it (with generous help from the College), Holy Cross was an absolute dream come true for me. Aside from the aforementioned “getting lost” on the way there, and then moving all my belongings up to Carlin III from the parking lot side rather than from the Carlin bridge side (meaning 5 flights of stairs instead of 3), the transition to Holy Cross was a smooth one. From the moment I arrived, I felt privileged beyond my wildest dreams to have been accepted to such a place. I had never been away from home/alone for an extended period of time but by the time my single bed was made and my parents said goodbye in the doorway of Carlin 333, I was completely ready for the independence that came with college. I can still remember that first evening, sleeping alone in my room (work-study freshmen arrived a day sooner than others) and not being scared, but being truly titillated by what was in store for me at this place. Funny thing was...I had no idea WHAT was in store, but I was certainly excited about it.

Basically, I grew up in a relatively sheltered world (did I tell you I was an altar boy from 5<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade?). Given the age difference between my older brothers and me (the baby of the family), there wasn’t a whole lot of boy roughhousing going on in my house. As a very young boy, I was more likely to be found inside watching the Fisher-Spassky World Chess Tournament on PBS (the whole thing) than outside playing with a friend. And in high school, my friends were the academic guys, more interested in yearbook, choir, and doing plays with the local girls’ school than sports (though I do remember being forced to play JV soccer for a couple of years – that was painful).

All of this said, you can imagine the many surprises associated with communal living when I moved on to Carlin III. Even though my family of 6 all shared one bathroom, not even that could prepare me for living on a hall full of wild, hormonal, newly-liberated young men. Growing up, I was taught to respect others' space, others' property and others' opinions...and suddenly it seemed I was one of just a few rule-keepers on a hall full of limit-testers (an exaggeration I'm sure, but that's how I felt). Add to this the fact that I was a non-athlete on a floor where they played lacrosse in the hallway and there were certainly times when I felt like a fish out of water.

And communal living didn't bring the only early surprises at Holy Cross. I was a first generation college student who really didn't know anything about what the college experience was supposed to be all about. I had always done well in school, but it was pretty easy to stay on the straight and narrow living at home AND having your mom as the school lunch lady (she knew my grades before I did). But I was far more ill-equipped to take full advantage of the college opportunities available than I ever knew. It wouldn't be until much later in life, perhaps graduate school, when I realized (and resented) the fact that Holy Cross did not pay attention to the invisible minority that is first-generation college students. But that is another essay.

Finally, transitioning to Holy Cross meant, for the first time, I found myself facing the challenge of being a gay man working hard to be straight in an environment where that seemed to be the only acceptable option. Not that I remember blatant homophobia – I honestly don't. But I do remember being very intimidated by the high level of testosterone in my new living environment and I confess that I ached to be "one of the guys." I wanted to be invited to squeeze into someone's room to watch a football game (though I wouldn't have cared about the game, it would have been fun to have been asked). I wanted to be involved in the hallway sport activity-du-jour. I wanted to make people laugh by farting publicly and as loudly as possible (I didn't really...but you know what I mean). I wanted to be "one of the guys."

But I never equated the fact that I wasn't one of the guys with the fact that I was gay. I wasn't one of the guys in high school either and just thought that I had different interests, was raised a little differently, and was more the sensitive guy-type than some of my new hallmates. Sure it would have been fun to be part of all that rabble-rousing, but gay or straight, that just wasn't who I was.

In retrospect, the transition to Holy Cross was a lot like going through adolescence all over again. I was having feelings I couldn't completely understand, I was anxious to be liked and accepted, and I was determined to be successful. So I re-employed the same successful tactics I used during adolescence. I used my extroversion to find a cohort of friends with whom I could be comfortable. I used my sense of humor to stand out from the crowd. And I used my sense of responsibility to become a leader among my peers (I knew I wanted to be an RA from the minute I met my freshman RAs).

As I grew into my own, I started to feel comfortable in my skin and began making choices that were right for me, without regard for what others might think. I can't remember how the idea first came



up, but I tried out for the football and basketball cheerleading squad and made it. (Okay, truth is there were just enough guys trying out to make a full squad, so it's not as if I or anyone else could have been turned away). And rather than experiencing the fear of being stereotyped as queer by being a male cheerleader, I felt quite the contrary. The other guys on the squad were cool and straight (as far as I knew) and this was my chance to be far closer to varsity athletics than most of the people on campus; traveling with the team and down on the field/court for all the games. And there was even a "cool" factor I hadn't anticipated – other guys loved to ask the male cheerleaders what it was like to have your hands all over your female partner. So in spite of the fact that my cheerleading partner wouldn't date me (yes...she dated one of the players) and in spite of the fact that I was attracted to several of the other male cheerleaders, I kept my feelings to myself and cheerleading was a great, two-year experience for me.

There were two other important choices I made at Holy Cross that kept me from spending time worrying about whether I was gay or not: first, my choice to stay as busy as possible with extracurricular activities. My involvements at Holy Cross (Purple Key, SPUD, cheerleading, RA, a couple of plays, Commencement Committee Chair, etc) all kept me very busy and I dove into them hook, line and sinker (sometimes at the expense of my academics, I am sorry to add). But I do credit these terrific opportunities – to both serve and to lead others – with my lifelong commitment to give back to my community and our world and try my best to truly live the words "men and women for others" that we so often heard on the Hill.

The other major factor that kept me from coming to terms with my true self was that sometime during sophomore year I met and fell in love with the woman who would be my steady girlfriend for a little over 3 years – Jeanne. Two years older, Jeanne graduated and entered JVC when I was still just a sophomore. She was (and is) an amazing person and back then she seemed like everything I could ever want in a spouse. So with such a strong bond, it only made sense that we would remain together even after she graduated. And obviously it was easy to remain faithful in her absence, keep myself preoccupied with activities, and really not needing to deal with my sexuality except during our infrequent, in-person visits. It was for me, at that time, the perfect relationship.

As I matured at Holy Cross, I became more and more pleased with the person I was becoming. I remember being proud of what I was achieving, and I remember always striving to do my best (at least outside the classroom). And I think it was as I continued to mature, take on leadership positions at the college, and began to realize and appreciate my potential as a whole person, that it finally hit me. I finally understood that I could never be the best I wanted to be and could never realize my full potential as a human being, without being honest with myself about my homosexuality. I was starting to realize that I was gay, the feelings were not going away, and that unless I came to terms with it, I could never be whole.

The first person I ever told that I was gay was a member of the Holy Cross counseling staff during my senior year. I remember the female counselor being compassionate enough, but with very little to offer me in terms of on-campus support. She asked me if I knew any other gay people on campus and I said no. She admitted there were really no opportunities to discuss this openly on our own

campus, and directed me to the Consortium Shuttle and Clark University's gay and lesbian student group. She also suggested I check out the handful of gay bars in downtown Worcester to get a sense of what the gay community is like. I left Hogan Campus Center thinking the Consortium Shuttle was too much of a hassle and going downtown to a gay bar alone was too frightening. So I rushed back into the closet, too busy with my senior year to really have time to sort this important issue out anyway. I mean after all, I was Commencement Committee Chair and had a graduation to plan. Coming out would have to wait. And wait it did.

But in June 1984, with the cocoon of Holy Cross behind me, things became very complicated very quickly. I transitioned from an environment I had learned to manage and master to one both macho and homophobic – my first job in commercial banking. I was miserable with the job and my relationship with Jeanne died shortly after graduation, probably accelerated by my Italian family who continued to press me hard about when we would be engaged (“You’ve been dating for three years...isn’t it about time?”). And I was increasingly troubled by my struggle with admitting I was gay.

So with a miserable job, and the inevitable death of my relationship, the final complication for this fresh college graduate was my first true gay experience. In the context of so much confusion and fear about my future, the fact that this first experience felt so right was what made me decide that I needed to face the truth. I suddenly realized that only by coming to terms with my sexuality would I be able to become the full realization of all that God had put me on earth to be. Though I quickly realized it would be a lot more difficult to live an openly gay life while living at home with my parents, or even in living in Boston, for that matter.

Though I knew little about other cities outside of the northeast, I was always intrigued by Chicago. After a brief, targeted job search I landed a job there and on July 5, 1985, with my light blue Ford Escort pulling a small U-Haul with what few belongings I had, I made the drive from Boston to Chicago to begin my life away from family and all the friends I knew, and began my life as an openly gay man.

With the help of wonderful, new friends in Chicago and lifelong friends in Boston with whom I shared my sexuality, coming out to my parents went as well as one might expect. There were lots of tears – my mother worried that I would be alone for the rest of my life and my father resorted to the only thing he knew – the Catholic opinion that homosexuality is wrong and that I should pray about my decision. “You’ve quit smoking...I know you are strong...and I know you can get over this too.” (Yup...that’s what he said). But it wasn’t long after coming out to family that my sexuality became a non-issue. It is my very good fortune that, no matter what, the tight bonds of love and family are what drive our relationships, not the gender of whom I choose to spend my life with.

For 20 years I have lived with my wonderful husband, Steve. He has attended Holy Cross reunions with me, and I have attended his Duke reunions. We are blessed with families who are as committed to us as we are to them, and we consider ourselves so very lucky to have a life, for the most part, uncomplicated by stigma and prejudice against homosexuals. We currently live in California, a state

that allowed us both to co-adopt our now 13-year old son Baltazar without question (not the case in every state, as you know). And though we stand today as one of only 18,000 same-sex couples still married in the state of California, we are encouraged by the other states that have realized it is human rights, not gay rights, that allow same sex people to legally join in marriage.

When one considers how far the world has come in just the last ten years with regard to gay rights and societal attitudes about homosexuality, it is no surprise that Holy Cross – both the college and the students attending – was unequipped in the early 1980s to help me wrestle with my own homosexuality. And if I knew then what I know now, about my own sexuality and about the Catholic Church's continued and absolute intolerance of homosexuality, it would be difficult to make the choice to attend such a place. Because at the end of the day, there isn't a single Catholic institution that can truly, fully embrace me, my husband of 20 years and my adopted child as equals to our heterosexual peers. On the other hand, if making the decision to attend Holy Cross today – whether for myself or for my son – I would be conflicted knowing that it was in this officially homophobic setting that real, positive growth happened for me and many other young men and women.

In spite of the impossibility of gay marriages in St. Joseph's Chapel (wouldn't that be something?), I do believe that the messages of tolerance, respect, and the preservation of human dignity were prominent and openly discussed at Holy Cross, particularly in the classroom. How unfortunate that, while these lessons were passionately discussed in the context of gender equality, race relations and liberation theology, they were never discussed in the context of homosexuality. But again...it is not Holy Cross I blame for this. If anything, Jesuits have always been on the cutting edge of progressive social thought. It is the Roman Catholic Church and Holy Cross's affiliation with it that I blame...but that's another essay too!

I loved my Holy Cross experience and owe a debt of gratitude to all the men and women, and very special Jesuits, who took the impressionable clay that arrived on Mt. St. James and helped me be the person I am today. And while there were many things I took away from my Holy Cross years, probably most important for me was a strong sense of commitment. Through the love and support of so many very special lay teachers and Jesuits, I learned the importance of always trying to live a life that is at its core faith-based, respectful and tolerant of others, and one that is committed to sharing the time, talent and treasure so richly given to me and to my family. It is this shared core commitment that has kept my husband and me together for 20 years. It is this shared core commitment that has allowed us to open our hearts to our adopted son, his half-siblings, and other birth relatives. And while it may not have happened AT Holy Cross, it is this core commitment, formed by my experiences there, that ultimately helped me accept who I am as a child of God and my unequivocal confidence in our family's sacred inclusion in His world.

## OUT FROM DARKNESS AND INTO LIGHT

By Nan O'Connor ('84)

I never dreamed when I was graduating on Fitton Field in 1984 that I would be asked nearly twenty-five years later to contribute to a collection of essays about being a lesbian at Holy Cross. I hope that sharing my coming out story will help to create a Holy Cross community that truly embraces the diversity of all of its students including gays, lesbians and bisexuals.

Before describing my experience at Holy Cross, I would like to tell you about my background and what brought me to this college. I am the fourth of five children in my very Irish Catholic family. My mother's maiden name was O'Connor when she married my father Edward O'Connor. My parents have been married for 53 years. They continue to live in the same house in Manchester, New Hampshire where I spent the first eighteen years of my life.

My parents encouraged each of us to put our heart and soul into all that we did. All five of us did well academically and were leaders in our high school. During my tenure at Central High School I was the first woman to be named a sports editor of our award winning newspaper, co-captain of the women's varsity soccer team, secretary of the Student Council and a longstanding member of our parish folk group where I played the guitar and sang.

During my senior year at high school I had to decide between attending Holy Cross College and Brown University. I believe that in many ways my upbringing influenced my decision to attend Holy Cross. By virtue of the way they lived their lives, my parents instilled in me the desire to do for others. My parents are two of the most thoughtful and generous people I have ever known and I wanted to emulate them. So in my decision making process, I asked myself which institution would help me grow to become a more thoughtful and better person. I decided that Holy Cross would provide the academic, emotional and spiritual support that would help me become the best adult I could be.

So, imagine my surprise my freshman year when I realized that I was a lesbian. I fell in love with a woman who was a senior in my dorm. Believe me, this had not been part of my plan for becoming a better person. Part of what made this discovery so difficult for me is that I suffered from internalized homophobia. Homophobia is defined as the irrational fear, disgust or hatred of gays, lesbians or bisexuals. Internalized homophobia is the irrational fear, disgust or hatred of one's own attraction to someone of the same sex. I had internalized messages from society, my church and even from my family that gays, lesbians and bisexuals were evil and immoral. As kind as my parents were, it was okay in my family to make jokes at the expense of gays, lesbians and bisexuals. So, I had nineteen years of conditioning that supported the notion that being a lesbian was wrong. Therefore, I had tremendous difficulty reconciling my lesbianism with my positive self-image. I truly believed that I was a good person but how could I be a lesbian and still be a good person? My social conditioning had been so strong that in my mind being a lesbian and a good person were mutually exclusive. The messages I received from the Holy Cross community reinforced my belief.

Heterosexism pervaded the Holy Cross campus from 1980-1984. Heterosexism is a form of oppression that assigns rights and privileges to heterosexuals that are denied to gays, lesbians and bisexuals. In a heterosexist atmosphere, there is an underlying assumption that everyone is heterosexual. Therefore, it becomes permissible to make gay jokes because no one will be offended. It is okay to use derogatory words such as faggot or dyke because no one will be hurt. Moreover, in such an atmosphere threatening those one perceives as gay is also tolerated.

My girlfriend received threatening phone calls repeatedly before she graduated in May of 1981. Members of the community made assumptions about her sexual orientation because of her very masculine appearance. The callers taunted and verbally harassed her. She felt scared and feared for her safety. I felt frightened as well and decided that the way for me to survive at Holy Cross was to be in the closet. So, I decided never to tell anyone about my lesbian identity.

Keeping busy was one of the ways I remained closeted. Four of my friends and I were determined to transform women's soccer from a club sport to a varsity sport. When we arrived at Holy Cross, there was a men's soccer team but soccer was only a club sport for women. We worked with the administration for four years and in our senior year women's soccer was granted varsity status and I was elected as one of the team's captains. Despite the fact that we worked long hours together, I never told any of my four friends that I was a lesbian. One day, during my senior year, it was half-time at one of our big games. We were down by a couple of goals and our chances of winning seemed slim. One of my four friends was giving us a pep talk to inspire us to victory in the second half. She concluded her talk by saying, "Come on you guys, we can beat them. They are just a bunch of dykes." I remember the sting of that comment and I also remember wondering if my friend would still like and respect me if she knew I were a lesbian. Would I be one of the captains of my team if I were an out lesbian? I also remember looking down and remaining silent.

One of the most painful parts of being a lesbian at Holy Cross was the isolation I experienced. Like many other gays and lesbians, one of the ways I managed my feelings of isolation was by drinking alcoholically. It is not a coping mechanism I would recommend to anyone. In retrospect, I believe I was using alcohol to numb my pain. While drinking was not a long-term solution, it offered temporary relief from feeling alienated and alone. Drinking heavily was a way that I convinced myself that I belonged. I was a regular at the pub. I used to challenge football players to chugging contests and I would win. I would tell myself that I was just another fun-loving Irish Catholic kid who liked to work hard, study hard and drink hard. In this way, I tried to convince myself that I belonged. I would wake up in the morning feeling hung over and alone.

I experienced a profound sense of loneliness at Holy Cross. Perhaps the most difficult time for me was sophomore year when my partner who had graduated and moved out of state broke up with me. She was the one person at Holy Cross who I knew was a lesbian and she was ending our relationship. I believed that I would never meet another lesbian and I would live my life alone. The pain felt intolerable and I longed for someone with whom I could talk to share my



sadness. A gay and lesbian support group did not exist at Holy Cross and Allies was not in existence either. If I dared to tell any of my straight friends that my partner had broken up with me I risked rejection and further loss. I could not bear the thought of more loss.

Late one night during my sophomore year, I could not sleep because I felt so sad and alone. I left my room in Wheeler to go for a walk where I could cry and not be overheard. I ended up at the top of the stairs before the bridge that led into Carlin. I thought to myself if I fell down these stairs I could escape from this pain and no one would ever have to know that I was a lesbian. In that moment, death seemed preferable to coming out. Thirty-four percent of gay, lesbian and bisexual teens have attempted suicide. I believe that the problem lies not in being gay, lesbian or bisexual but rather in living in a frightening and condemning world.

That night I realized that I needed to talk to one of my friends. I knew I could no longer bear the pain alone. I came out to my friend who had lived on my floor freshman year and much to my surprise she was very supportive. She also confided in me that her sister was a lesbian. I was shocked. That disproved my theory that I was one of the world's only two lesbians! Coming out to this friend marked the beginning of my healing process. She suggested that I find someone to talk to on a regular basis and she highly recommended Sister Anna Kane of the chaplain's office. Talking with Sister Anna was uplifting. She gave me unconditional support and understanding at a critical time in my life. She was my ally. After talking with her regularly for about a year, I gained the strength to come out to my closest friends.

Another helpful experience was learning of the gay and lesbian alliance at Clark University which held meetings every Thursday. I began attending every week and I was so impressed by the members. They seemed so strong and smart and articulate and sure of themselves. They seemed proud to be gay men and lesbians. They were supportive and welcoming and it was with them that I began to learn about self-acceptance.

One of my next challenges was coming out to my family. I had been hiding my identity and lying to my sisters and brother for two years and I wanted to end the lies. I had always been very close to my siblings and I didn't like feeling like I was hiding from them and being dishonest.

Each of my sisters cried when I told them I was a lesbian. My sister Carol did not believe me at first. When she realized I was not kidding, she said she felt guilty and responsible for my sexual orientation because she had fought with me so much in my youth. My sister Alice cried and told me that she had a hunch that I might be a lesbian but she had been hoping that her hunch was wrong. My sister Beth cried and asked me to promise not to tell my parents. She threatened to move to Canada if I came out to them because she felt like they would not be able to endure the news. My brother Danny who can be quite reserved held me in his arms and cried and told me that he would always love me. Initially, he was the only sibling who supported me in my desire to come out to my parents. His philosophy was the sooner I disclosed to them the longer they would have to get used to the idea. I continue to this day to be grateful to my brother for his wisdom. Despite his heartfelt support, I was still too afraid to come out to my parents at this time.

When I graduated from Holy Cross in 1984, I moved across the country to become a member of the Jesuit Volunteer Corps in San Jose, California. I made a commitment to myself that if I were going to live three thousand miles away from all of my family and friends, I would no longer hide my sexual orientation. I had learned that the cost of leading a double life was far too great. I was determined to start a new life where people would love me and accept me for exactly who I was or not at all. I had seven roommates in the JVC including five men and two women. My commitment to be an out lesbian was so strong that by the end of our first week of living together, I had told each one that I was a lesbian.

With the support of my JVC community, I mustered the strength and courage I needed to come out to my parents. That was perhaps one of the most difficult tasks I have undertaken but also one of the most freeing. I flew home to our beach house in Manomet, Massachusetts for the Memorial Day week-end. I asked all of my siblings to be home to support both my parents and me. My mother cried for most of the week-end and my father became very quiet and distant. At the end of the week-end, my parents asked to speak to me. My father did most of the talking. He told me that he and my mother believed that the only way I would ever have a happy, healthy life would be to change my sexual orientation, get married and have children. Marriage to someone of the opposite sex worked for my mother and father so surely it would work for me. My father said he would find a psychiatrist for me so I could begin the process immediately. This response from the man who had always been so proud of me hurt deeply. This was the response I had feared. Couldn't he see that I was still the very same person whom he had always loved and respected?

The following year proved to be a difficult one for my parents and me. Our conversations were often tense and strained. My parents met with a priest. They confided in him that I was a lesbian and he assured them that this was a phase that would surely pass. Fortunately, my parents sought out further information. They read books and listened to tapes about parents of gay and lesbian children. They went to counseling in Boston. They found a counselor whom they respected. When, they asked the counselor what was wrong with me, he responded, "Nothing." He went on to say that their lack of acceptance was the root problem. My parents took his words seriously and began their own process of acceptance.

I give my parents enormous credit for the additional steps they took to educate themselves after their counseling experiences. They talked with each other more frequently and they talked with me more openly. These talks led them to understand that I did not choose to be a lesbian but rather I discovered that I was a lesbian. They learned that for me being a lesbian was my sexual orientation rather than my sexual preference.

I live with my life partner Ellen in San Francisco. Ellen and I just celebrated our twentieth anniversary. She is embraced as a member of our family by my parents, my siblings and by all twelve of my nieces and nephews. My parents hosted the commitment ceremony we had to honor our ten year anniversary. What has been helpful in terms of my family's process of accepting us and supporting us is candid dialogue. We continue to dare to talk with each other and challenge each other. Candid dialogue with our families and our communities are dependent upon each of us coming out.

Like my parents, Holy Cross College has also changed. I learned this firsthand in 1995 when Marybeth Kearns Barrett, my friend and one of the chaplains at Holy Cross, asked me to come speak at the college about my experience coming out as a lesbian there. I had the honor of speaking with Jeanne Seidler from the class of '95. The Hogan ballroom was filled with over 800 students all of whom seemed to be listening attentively to our stories. In the question and answer period that followed, the students asked such thoughtful questions and listened respectfully to our responses. This incredible opportunity was so healing to me and served as yet another reminder of how coming out can effect change.

I was very honored when James Nickoloff of the Department of Religious Studies approached me to write this essay. Holy Cross College was without a doubt the most difficult place I have ever lived as a lesbian. I attribute the multiple challenges I faced to the prevailing myth that gays, lesbians and bisexuals do not attend Holy Cross. This myth has allowed for too much silent suffering. Books such as this one, break that silence and lead the way to creating an atmosphere that celebrates the rich and diverse student body at Holy Cross which includes gays lesbians and bisexuals.

Gay men, lesbians and bisexuals have attended Holy Cross in the past. Gay men, lesbians and bisexuals attend Holy Cross now. And gay men, lesbians and bisexuals will attend Holy Cross in the future. At a college whose mission statement encourages us "to seek justice within and beyond the Holy Cross community," no member of our community should feel unwelcome. No member of our community should live in fear. No member of our community should have to contemplate suicide or drink alcoholically to numb her pain. At a college with a mission of promoting justice within and beyond this community, we must be part of the solution of creating an atmosphere that will help future students live up to their brightest and fullest potential. Gay, lesbians and bisexual students cannot live up to their brightest potential if they are expending their energy concealing their sexual identity.

My parents continue to exemplify our potential for change. I was talking with them last week about writing this essay and I asked them how they felt about me sharing my coming out story in an essay. My 78 year old Irish Catholic father said "I am completely supportive of your effort," and my 77 year old Irish Catholic mother said, "Your bravery is sure to help students at Holy Cross and I admire you."

## OUTTA HERE

By Meghan T. Sweeney ('93)

The following letter to *The Crusader* was published in the first issue of the 1993-1994 academic year. As a recent graduate of Holy Cross, I was asked to write this letter as one way to open a conversation about and bring enhanced awareness of and visibility to queer student life.

August 7, 1993

Hello Holy Cross!

I remember it vividly. There we were, a sea of people on Washington D.C.'s Mall, dancing to the beat of RuPaul's "Supermodel" (While down at the Cape for Cape Week, I requested it in a couple of clubs. One d.j. told me that he refused to buy it - his loss. Instead, I requested the Soup Dragon's "Free," - my own little anthem). It was Sunday, April 25th, a beautiful, warm, sunny Spring day and the site of the 1993 Gay, Lesbian and Bi-Sexual civil rights march. I watched groups of gay and lesbian military personnel march down Pennsylvania Avenue and I felt so proud of them because of their courage. I was touched by the PFLAG groups (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) who had converged from all different parts of the country to show their love and support for their children and to show the rest of America what "family values" really means. Back at the Mall, Martina Navratilova spoke so honestly and logically while sporting her gay pride freedom rings, that I wondered how anyone couldn't agree with what she said. Martina was followed only by Melissa Etheridge (newly out), who I swoon over and who sang "Keep it Precious." The topper came though, as I was about to make my way back to the bus at RFK stadium, when the Indigo Girls performed. My stomach dropped, my heart raced, and I just stared at them starry-eyed as they sang an acapella number titled something like "It's Alright."\* It was, all in all, a great day - the kind of day that makes Monday and another long work week in a dull office seem tolerable, even not so bad.

I woke up late Monday morning (I was still at home), and somehow managed to do a three hour and fifteen minute drive in about 2:45. I raced into my ten o'clock class only a few minutes late. My professor (who I'm out to) asked in a surreptitious manner (knowing full well where I'd been) how my weekend was, as did one of my classmates who's also privy to my personal life. I responded, as non-chalantly as possible, "it was good, it was really good," all the while beaming from ear to ear. It really had been a good weekend. And while sitting there in my tutorial, among friends, I was still able to relish the joy and the comfort I'd felt of five brief hours in D.C.

That all ended, though, the moment the class was over.

Walking out of the building back to my dorm, I began to feel nauseous. My throat tightened, my muscles stiffened and my smile disappeared. I was back on "enemy territory." I hated being back, I hated walking around, I hated going to Kimball. For five hours in D.C., I was at ease, I felt a release, I was able to relax. And in those first few hours of being back, all the

good that had been done the day before, disappeared. I never did recover from the March because I realized, in my final weeks at Holy Cross, what a great job I had done of numbing myself to all that I had felt while I was there. Thankfully, I had only one more month. [So far, this young woman hasn't shed any tears. The only thing that saddens me is that my "college days," supposedly the "best years of my life" are over. Somehow, though, I don't buy the "best years" bit.]

There was one thing about Holy Cross, though, that I will always treasure, and that is the Chaplain's Office and the work they did with the Gay and Lesbian support group. In November of '92, I asked Kim McElaney if we could have a group. Two months later, at the beginning of second semester, we had a group. This group provided me with the same kind of release that the March gave me. The group gave me the freedom to just be, to relax, to say and to think what I wanted without having to worry who heard and without having to explain every little detail to straight people who sometimes just don't understand. I didn't need to explain, I didn't have to; everyone in the group was coming from the same situation. That one hour a week turned out to be my most important one. Except for that week in February when I, along with the rest of campus, was tackled by the flu, I never missed it.

We talked about everything that pertains to life, but from a uniquely lesbian and gay perspective. We talked about Holy Cross, family, friends, teachers, classes, relationships, religion, politics, commitment, coming out, etc. . . We didn't miss a beat. We talked about what we wanted to - we set the agenda. We talked about serious matters such as being kicked out of the house by your parents to frivolous stuff such as should I ask "mystery woman" out for coffee. That was it, yet that was everything. But we did more than just talk. I, for my own part, became stronger, less fearful, more confident. I didn't come out to all of Holy Cross (as much as I would've liked to), but, I did come out to a student organization that I belonged to. It was one of the easiest, yet one of the hardest things that I've ever done. But I did it. And on May 28th, with diploma in hand and my awards pinned to my gown, I knew I'd done it; I'd come out (no pun intended) a winner. I survived, and I survived well, one of the toughest places that I think I'll ever be in.

The original drafts of this letter were spent telling my own story of being lesbian at Holy Cross, but I don't want to bore anyone (Actually, each draft turned into a novella which is not the point of the letter. But, as the character Vivian in the movie "Dessert Hearts" says (a mainstream flick about a woman coming out), "I will simply write a short story about this place and get my revenge). Suffice it to say, the pain, the fear, the anger and the hate were very real and present during my junior and senior years. On a good day, I could take on the world, but those days were rare. Rather, a feeling of control of my own life and of Holy Cross eluded me constantly - I spent my days kowtowing to a place that breathes homophobia. I would highly encourage, therefore, anyone who knows themselves to be lesbian or gay at Holy Cross to seek out the group. And if you're not ready for a group, talk to someone in either the Chaplain's Office or the Counseling Center. A full third of teen and young adult suicides are committed by gays and lesbians who succumb to the pain, the fear, the anger and the hate (It's funny. For such a "pro-life" Church, I don't see the Pope (or Pat Buchanan for that matter) shedding any tears over these lost lives).

One final point. The group is still closed, meaning the time and the place are not going to be announced in The Daily News (for safety and confidentiality reasons). Someday, I hope it



won't have to be like this, but for now, it's the only way possible. And finally, as far as I've come, I haven't come far enough. I won't sign this letter, I can't - I'm still frightened. But suffice it to say

I am, respectfully yours,

Outta Here

August 22, 1993

\* I learned a few years later that the song was a cover of Simon and Garfunkel's "American Tune."

March, 2009

There had always been hints or clues in my life of queer desiring, but April 19, 1991 was the day that I realized finally that I was lesbian. It was a mild spring evening towards the end of my sophomore year, and I and another Holy Cross student had fallen in love. I was enlivened and paralyzed, thrilled and terrified. In an instant, all those little puzzle pieces that over the years that hadn't made much sense finally came together. And in that same instant I knew that how I perceived the world, and how the world perceived me, would be changed irrevocably. After a long and difficult conversation with her, I escaped in my car (the first of many such night-time getaways) and drove to an empty Auburn Mall parking lot and just sat in my car, talking myself down. I didn't want to admit to myself that I was gay. But I knew that not admitting this would be a non-option. I knew the truth, I was gay, and that evening confirmed years of suspicions. For the last few weeks of my sophomore year, my new girlfriend and I were delighting in each other and love's discovery, but absolutely closeted from everyone. I was in love with another human being for the first time in my life and I wanted to tell the whole world. But I could not and dare not.

At the beginning of my junior year, my girlfriend and I were still dating (we did through the fall of my senior year) and we were terrified that people would find out about us. Holy Cross felt to me like one big parochial school with nowhere to hide. Fear fed my imagination and I was terrified that I would walk into Kimball (which was the only dining hall on campus) one day and discover a huge white banner that said in big red letters, "Meghan Sweeney is GAY!" I feared for my social belonging and my physical safety. Despite my fears, I knew that I needed to tell someone. I had developed a pastoral relationship with Kim McElaney during my sophomore year, so in one of our first conversations of my junior year, I hemmed and hawed and danced around the issue. She said finally, "I think I know what you're trying to say. But it's important for you to say it." "I think I'm gay," I replied. This was my first articulation of my sexuality to a third party, and doing so was scary but a relief. That night there was a campus ministry meeting in Campion House that both Kim and I attended. I was sitting on a couch and despite empty chairs available, with deliberate intentionality Kim sat down right next to me. I cannot forget

how significant her small act was as a symbol of acceptance and love to my fragile sense of self. Through my senior year, most of my conversations with Kim consisted of my attempt to reconcile my sexuality and my spirituality, and all the issues therein of rejection, loathing, contempt, pity, and anger, as well as joy, grace, love, forgiveness, and resurrection.

My girlfriend and I were very protective about ourselves. We chose to come out to a few people only, mostly chaplains and professors, people whom we hoped or knew would keep our confidence because we wanted to be and feel in control, precisely because we felt so out of control, about that part of our lives that was so intimate, so vulnerable. Towards the end of my junior year I was growing into my sexual identity, into some self-confidence, and into strong critiques of Roman Catholic magisterial theology. In a Religious Studies seminar, "Conflicts in the Church," I took a bold stand on same-sex relationships. While I didn't explicitly come out, anybody who was paying attention could infer that this was a deeply personal issue for me. And somebody in fact had been paying attention. The next night, late in the evening after I had returned home from being with my girlfriend, my roommate was frantically pacing, waiting for me. She didn't know where I'd been and despite her best efforts, she couldn't find me (these were pre-cell phone days). On our answering machine was a death threat directed at me invoking a gamut of incendiary, perverse nouns, adjectives, and verbs to describe and threaten homosexuals. She had already told our resident director, who also was my boss in my capacity as a resident assistant. I was spinning; the situation was an imploding, freakish mess, and I felt like I had no control over what was happening. Not only had I been threatened, but I wasn't out to my roommate or my resident director, nor did I want to come out to either of them. I wasn't ready. While I skirted around the issue with my roommate, the next day I was forced to come out, as well as to out my girlfriend, to my resident director, to the dean of student life, and to the Holy Cross police department when they questioned me about the tape. I didn't want to be there and I was made to feel like I had done something wrong. When the dean and the police asked me if I knew who the student or students were on the tape, while I had a strong suspicion, nevertheless I said "no." Holy Cross had no mechanism in place for investigating this particular kind of hate crime, and all parties involved (myself included) seemed relieved that a formal investigation would not be undertaken; the police and the dean seemed incredibly ill at ease with the whole situation, and I just wanted it to go away. Despite the upper administration's failures, my resident director, who never lost sight of the fact that I had indeed received a death threat, was wonderful to me throughout that and other trying situations that year. For so many reasons, because of and all compounded by being lesbian and also so closeted and self-protective, my junior year had been difficult and painful and I just wanted it over.

By all accounts I was a pretty "good kid," highly scrupulous and a terrible liar. But my junior year I became an excellent liar and quite adept at sneaking around, not telling anyone where and with whom I was going. I wanted to maintain at least the illusion of safety and control. During the summer between junior and senior years, I had a phone conversation with my only peer to whom I was out. She told me quite directly that my roommate, the same roommate who had heard and reported the death threat, thought that I didn't like her because I never told her where I was going or what I was doing. This was a sobering and harsh wake-up call that in my efforts to

protect myself I had pushed away and hurt someone whom I liked and admired. I didn't recognize myself and my behavior and I began to wonder how many others I had hurt, including myself. That summer ended-up being a miraculous healing one for me during which I grew into a kind of self-possession and self-understanding that had eluded me previously. Because I felt more secure in myself, I was ready to begin to give up my perceived sense of control, which in reality had been tenuous at best. When my senior year began, I picked-up my roommate at the airport, took her to dinner, and came out to her. I also came out to my suitemates as well as a few more friends and professors. Nobody was surprised, and in fact most were quite supportive. There was a certain freedom and release in this; it was nice to talk about my life without censoring myself, without cutting myself off from others and from myself, without deception, omissions, and lying. While I hardly was out to the entire school, I possessed an inner security and authority that sustained me throughout that year.

Requesting through the Chaplains' Office a support group for queer students was a consequence of my developing self-possession and self-security. My girlfriend had graduated the previous May, I felt isolated and I wanted to meet more gay people on campus (my first friendship with another lesbian student had been arranged through the Counseling Center and the Chaplains' Office). I asked Kim McElaney for the group in November, and it began in January. Under the patient, encouraging, and loving guidance of Marybeth Kearns-Barrett, the group discussed sexuality as it related to various issues. Because of the confidentiality of the group (any student who wanted to join needed to first meet with Marybeth, and the place, date, and time were not publicized), it was a welcome and safe space of reprieve. We were an eclectic group, often people whose only commonality was a minority sexuality and who wouldn't ordinarily have been friends or even conversation partners under more typical circumstances. I was very grateful for the group for peer and Marybeth's counsel, and for the safe space and the sense of ease it provided (see the above letter). Nevertheless when combined with my experiences of the Women's Center in Cambridge every Monday evening for a lesbian discussion group and going to Cambridge with some frequency to go to a lesbian bar and dance club, both which I loved doing, I began to realize that queer sexuality does not a community make. While I certainly enjoyed and took solace in queer space, I had much more in common with my straight friends who shared similar academic, extracurricular, and spiritual interests than I did with many of the lesbian and gay people I was meeting. However, I also became mindful that desiring queer was exploding my boundaries of race, class, and religion, and these changing social circles introduced me to people whom I might never have met otherwise.

One of the groups that I had found a home in during my senior year at Holy Cross was Pax Christi. Some of my friends were already in the group, and although I wasn't much of a "peacenik" (that was the reputation of Pax Christi), I decided to give it a try. It proved to be a fruitful and concrete expression of my intellectual and spiritual proclivities. Emboldened by my experiences at the March on Washington (see the above letter) and my palpable sense of homophobia and heterosexual privilege when I returned to Mt. St. James, towards the end of the school year I had been thinking more and more about coming out to this group of students whom I liked and trusted, but I wasn't sure. In our final meeting, during our last group reflection, I

found myself talking. I knew that this was it, my one and only chance. I don't remember exactly what I was saying, but the next thing I knew, I was coming out. A first-year student in the group who would go on to have an enormous impact on the life of queer students at Holy Cross, perhaps strengthened by what I had done, came out also. Euphoric cannot begin to describe the state I was in as a consequence of these actions; I was beaming from ear to ear (and I've got pictures to prove it!). We were both so well-received and so loved by our peers in that moment. As a graduating senior it did much to make-up for some of my more damaging experiences at Holy Cross. I felt confirmed in my existence and loved. While I always had an internal faith and strength that sustained me, I also had a sense of how important community was for me. I was gladdened to have such a life-giving experience of Christian community.

Hands down, my senior year was my best year at Holy Cross. I was having fun with my various groups of friends and I was thriving in many ways, not just spiritually and socially, but also academically. I was a Religious Studies major and decided to submit a paper for consideration for the Hartigan Medal, which awarded the best paper in Religious Studies. The paper, "Sexism, Homophobia, and the Church," which considered critically the origins of homophobia in misogyny, won the award. What a thrill! The paper felt like a senior thesis of my entire person, and while it was difficult to write, I was glad to have the opportunity to do so and I felt somehow vindicated that it and I had won. The awards ceremony was in Dinand Library the day before commencement. As the academic departmental awards began to be given, I and many others who were knowledgeable about my paper realized that the titles of student projects that had earned awards were actually being read aloud. With baited breath, we waited. And then in a reading room full of students, faculty, administrators, and doting families (mine included), the Jesuit vice president of the college read aloud the title of my paper. I don't remember all the details of those few seconds when I stood and walked to receive my award, but I do remember the applause getting really loud. Many congratulations followed. In combination with receiving the Pedro Arrupe Medal and Prize for Outstanding Service given by the Chaplains' Office, it had been a great day. After the awards ceremony was the baccalaureate Mass, and during the liturgy I just remember thinking and feeling "Mother God is holding my hand, and she's never going to let go." For all who knew and could guess, on my graduation cap I had the words "Outta Here" taped on in rainbow letters, an image captured as the last words of my graduating class yearbook, and the moniker I used subsequently in my anonymous letter to *The Crusader* (see above).

Things were changing step-by-step at Holy Cross, and the time was ripe to press the college on issues of human sexuality. With a little prodding from those still at Holy Cross, I wrote the above letter to the editor. Although it wasn't the paper's practice to publish anonymous letters, I commend the editorial staff at the time for its brave decision to publish the letter nonetheless. I had graduated and was far from Worcester doing a year with the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, but I heard that the general reception of the letter was positive, and if nothing else, it brought a measure of visibility to queer life at Holy Cross and got discussion going. Although re-reading the letter 16 years later elicits various critiques from me, nevertheless what I wrote was insightful and accurate. I am very glad and proud of the role that I played in seeking justice for queer students at Holy Cross.

Today I have deeply conflicted feelings towards Holy Cross, and I resist things like the annual fund and class reunions and football-based homecomings (the dominant culture of Holy Cross didn't and doesn't have much appeal for me). However, I recognize that I thrived there. It was a place where my intellectual and spiritual gifts could develop and where I could grow into a sense of me. The paradox was and remains that it was my Roman Catholic chaplains, my Roman Catholic Religious Studies professors, and many of my Roman Catholic friends who showed forth God's love in face of hateful Roman magisterial teachings and rhetoric, not only about sexual minorities but also about women. They possessed an insightful spirit of the law, perhaps a spirit forged and developed because of struggle, and loved me into a sense of wholeness and integrity. They helped me to feel that I belonged and was valued, that I was wanted. If God's love for a human being is conveyed in relationships and through particularities, these people showed me God's love for me. But it was also my time at Holy Cross that began to show me the limits, the hypocrisies, the arrogant sins of my Roman heritage and its consequent cultural permutations. Holy Cross was deeply homophobic, patriarchal, and somewhat misogynistic (it often felt like a men's college that just happened to allow women).

In my pockets of safety and grace, Holy Cross felt like home and I thrived. When I graduated, however, I was ill-prepared for the reality that there could be no structure or people in my life that would and could once again hold the totality of the depth of my spiritual, religious, intellectual, sexual, and gender identities together. I would need to forge my own way, and I have stumbled on this path and it has been a difficult way. While I am mindful that this reflection bears the mark of a 22 year-old's developmental perspective and that forging one's path is a common struggle and mandate shared by most regardless of individual life-situations and particularities, Holy Cross gave me a taste of what my life *could* be and feel like, and at times I miss it and I grieve it, both what was and the latent possibility therein even as I continue to forge and grow into a joyful synthesis of being and feeling wholly at home.

We must seek those situations and people in our lives that are life-giving. I transferred to Holy Cross as a sophomore from the University of Chicago because I sensed that Holy Cross would be more life-giving for me. I was right. It was what I needed when I needed it, inclusive of the struggle because of which I grew enormously. I would not have wanted to come out to myself and others anywhere else because even in the midst of the dominant cultural homophobia and heterosexism, at Holy Cross I was held and loved. I am deeply grateful that I had this place and these people. And I deeply admire those students, staff, and faculty who continue, sometimes at great cost to themselves, to witness to the fullness of God's love in their work and ministry, who share deeply Paul's faith that "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8: 38-39).



## **HOLY TRANSFORMATION: FROM SILENCE TO STANDING OVATION**

By Jeannie Seidler ('96)

Had I known when I was applying for colleges that Holy Cross was rated by the “Princeton Student Guide” and the magazine *Ten Percent* as tied for the title of “worst school in the country for gays and lesbians,” I doubt I would have applied. However, I didn’t consult with either the Princeton Guide or *Ten Percent* when I was choosing a college. Instead, I relied on my gut instinct and the reputation of Holy Cross’ Jesuit education.

I grew up in a large, conservative Catholic family in Southern California. I attended Catholic schools and went to church at least once a week. My high school was an all-female school with only 68 students in my graduating class. I was active in campus ministry, student government, varsity athletics, and various clubs and organizations. When junior year rolled around and it came time to look at colleges, I narrowed my search by looking primarily at co-ed Catholic liberal arts colleges with fewer than 10,000 students. Wanting to grow intellectually, personally, and spiritually, I was drawn to HC’s small class size, its low student/faculty ratio, its Jesuit commitment to educating “men and women for others,” and the school’s emphasis on building community. And I must admit that, coming from Los Angeles, I was drawn to the old brick buildings, the thought of colorful Fall leaves and yes, even the cold, snowy winters.

While I knew I was attracted to women rather than men prior to coming to Holy Cross, I never thought to look for a college that was welcoming of gay, lesbian, and bisexual students. Perhaps in part because at that time I didn’t identify myself as lesbian. I had grown up believing the stereotypes that lesbians are man-hating, masculine-looking, motorcycle-riding sinners – none of which described me. And perhaps in part because I didn’t know that places where my faith and sexual orientation would both be embraced existed.

Among the many things to be nervous about when starting college, meeting one’s roommate is at the top of the list. For someone who is gay, or, for that matter, different in any way from the typical straight, white, middle-class, J-Crew-wearing, 18-year old Catholic attending HC, there are additional worries and fears aside from simply “will we get along?” I was fortunate enough to be paired with a roommate who mentioned within the first week that one of her friends from high school was gay. Right then, I knew I was in luck. Yet I still worried: How would she feel about living in close quarters with someone who is lesbian. What if I told her and she didn’t want to live with me anymore? What if she thought I was attracted to her? What if...?

After a couple of weeks of having everyone I met assume that I was heterosexual and hearing numerous gay “jokes,” I began to feel isolated, different, lonely, invisible, and depressed. I needed to tell someone. And while the stakes were high, my roommate, Molly, was the only person I’d heard say anything positive about LGB persons. Terrified, I somehow mustered the courage to tell her 18 days after we met. In fact, Molly was the first person I ever came out to.

Molly jumped out of her bed that night and gave me a big hug. She thanked me for trusting her enough to tell her and began asking me questions about how I knew, when I knew, if I was dating anyone, etc. What a relief it was not to have to hide or put up barriers, and be completely authentic.

Throughout that first semester, I told a few other friends who lived with me in Healy, my dormitory. These “coming outs” were more often than not met with disbelief. It was only after I proved that I wasn’t joking or lying, that they were able to engage in conversation about it. I attribute this to both the heterosexism embedded in the culture at Holy Cross and society in general, and to the fact that I did not fit the stereotype of how a lesbian should look or behave.

While everyone at Holy Cross to whom I came out was respectful, open to talking about it, and accepting to some degree, finding those I could trust enough to share that part of me was not an easy task. It was a stressful undercurrent that constantly accompanied me, whether in the classroom, dorms, or dining hall, in a meeting with a professor or at a gathering of friends.

Take for example, the two guys from my class whom I met on the “first-year day away retreat.” I initially liked to spend time with them because they were friendly, “familiar” in that they reminded me of some of the guys I knew in high school, and not interested in the “getting-drunk-and-finding-someone-to-hook-up-with” culture. At first, they felt “safe” to be around. But I quickly distanced myself from them after a conversation about the U.S. military’s new “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy led to their informing me that “homos” are “disgusting,” “evil,” “sick,” “abnormal,” “worse than rapists,” and that sometimes they just “wanted to beat the faggot right out of those perverts.”

### Acknowledging our Existence

In the fall of 1992, my first year at HC, I noticed the announcement in the Daily News that the Chaplains’ Office was starting a support group for gay and lesbian students. At that time it was for gay and lesbian students only--bisexual students were included within a semester or two. It felt great to see that announcement, but that first semester, even the thought of joining was too overwhelming. I was becoming more comfortable with my identity as a lesbian, but I wasn’t so sure I wanted to join a group with other lesbian and gay students. What if “they” weren’t like me? What if “they” were more like the stereotypes I thought of when I heard the label “gay” or “lesbian”? I desperately wanted to meet other people “like me.” In hindsight, I can see that I was struggling with my own internalized homophobia.

As it turned out, the group didn’t start until the second semester, and by then I had realized that, despite my fears, I both wanted and needed to meet other gay and lesbian students. Having support and acceptance from my heterosexual roommate and a few other heterosexual friends was liberating, and more than I had ever had in the past. But despite their support, my feelings of isolation continued to grow. I needed to meet others to whom I didn’t have to explain myself, who knew what it was like to not only be gay, but to be gay and Catholic. I wanted to speak with others who knew the risks, struggles and joys of coming out. I needed a space where I could be myself,

safely explore my own homophobia, and not be alone in my struggle to understand this part of my identity.

The weekly support group meeting's location, day, and time were not publicized in order to protect members' privacy and confidentiality. In order to attend, a student needed to contact the Chaplains' Office and meet one of the Chaplains to talk about wanting to join the group. So in February of my first year, I sent a note to Kim McElaney, the Director of the Chaplains' Office. I had had some interaction with the Chaplains' Office at the first-year retreat in September and through my involvement with Pax Christi, a student chapter of the National Catholic organization that promotes non-violence and social justice.

While the Chaplains I had met seemed like caring, open-minded, nice people, would someone in the Chaplains' Office at a Catholic college really be accepting of me as a lesbian? I was a nervous wreck! That is, until I got a note back from Kim thanking me for being courageous enough to write to her. She proposed some times that I could come in to meet with her to learn more about the support group and other offerings through the Chaplains' Office such as spiritual direction.

The first support group meeting was run by two of the chaplains, Marybeth Kearns-Barrett and Fr. Peter McGrath. There were only two other students there, one of whom I already knew from Pax Christi, Meghan Sweeny. We shared our stories, our struggles, our triumphs, our questions, our insecurities, our crushes, our faith, our fears, and our hopes. It was the one hour each week when we could let our guards down. It was an hour of refuge I looked forward to each week.

As for the rest of campus, most people were oblivious to the existence of non-heterosexuals on campus. There were no openly gay students, staff or faculty members--not one out gay, lesbian, or bisexual person on campus. And as far as I knew there never had been any, at least not in institutional Crusader memory. There were a few classes that touched on homosexuality, such as Jim Nickoloff's classes "North American Theology of Liberation" and "Contemporary Christian Spirituality," and Brian Linnane's "Sexual Ethics." But overall there was very little intellectual discourse on sexuality in general, not to mention, homosexuality. The formation of the Gay/Lesbian Support Group was the beginning of a new era – the era of Holy Cross acknowledging that we existed!

### Responding to Ignorance and Fear

In September 1993, the beginning of my Sophomore year, there were several letters to the editor in the weekly school newspaper, The Crusader, about LGB life at HC, including an anonymous letter from a lesbian alumna, my friend Meghan Sweeny signed, "Outta Here." This was followed by another anonymous letter signed, "Still Here," which I had written but chose not to sign, like Meghan. These anonymous letters were followed by numerous signed letters from heterosexual allies. There was no denying that there were GLB alumni and students, and yet we remained invisible to most. We were scared. Each day, gay jokes were made, people were called

“faggot,” and if a woman didn’t want to hook-up she was labeled a “dyke.” Occasionally, hatred and fear escalated and someone, or a group of people, would write hateful things on a dorm door or make threatening phone calls to students who were suspected of being gay.

These ignorant and hateful actions, while keeping many of us fearfully in the closet, also had a mobilizing effect. HC’s administration and Student Government Association (SGA) spoke out against such acts saying that there would be no tolerance for hatred and violence on our campus. Now that it was acknowledged that we existed, such acts of violence could no longer be shoved under the rug; members of the HC community were being threatened, intimidated, and targeted. A more substantial response was needed; it was time for action.

A small group of students, faculty, and chaplains met to strategize. We decided to ask Brian McNaught to come give a talk. His award-winning book On Being Gay was one of a few books on homosexuality in the library. As an openly gay Catholic man, a well-respected educational consultant and an eloquent public speaker, McNaught brought the promise of respect and acceptance for other gay Catholics. Sponsored by SGA and the Council of Presidents, McNaught came and spoke on campus in February 1994, with about 400-500 people in attendance. That night was the first time I ever heard someone openly talk about being gay. He spoke with pride, confidence, and passion. Hearing him speak, and seeing the students and faculty give him a standing ovation, gave me hope. Maybe there was an alternative to living in the closet.

### Building Alliances

Brian McNaught challenged all members of the HC community to take a proactive approach to making HC a safer and more accepting environment. In response to his challenge, a group quickly mobilized and began having regular weekly meetings to continue the conversation McNaught had started. We called ourselves “Allies.” Unlike the support group which was exclusively for students who identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, Allies was a gay-straight alliance made up of students, faculty, and staff members who wanted to address and eradicate homophobia and heterosexism on campus. By the end of the 1994 school year, we had about 40 people attending the meetings, had elected a board, and had a mailing list of about 140 by year’s end. The challenge of those first few months was to gain recognition as an official student organization.

Jason Longchamps ’93 and I were the first co-chairs of Allies. With the help of the rest of our board, we contacted other Catholic colleges to find out whether they had similar groups and, if so, what their mission and constitution stated. We had no luck. As far as we could tell, no other Catholic college or university had recognized a group that specifically addressed LGBT issues. Boston College had an unofficial GLBT student group, but they were not recognized by Boston College, did not receive any student organization funding, and were not allowed to meet on campus. They had been fighting the administration for years without success.

Although this didn’t surprise me, it did feel antithetical to the values espoused by the Catholic Church. Official Church doctrine states that those with a homosexual orientation are “intrinsically disordered” but are not morally culpable. Acting on one’s orientation, however, is

called a “grave moral evil” (CDF 1986 Letter, 3). While I personally disagreed with this teaching, it did not provide any basis on which to deny the formation of a group such as Allies, whose mission it was to address and eradicate fear, hatred, and violence in our community. In fact, Catholic tradition and the teachings of Jesus emphasize respecting and loving all people, decrying violence, particularly violence toward the most vulnerable members of society, and the call to love others without judgment. As we saw it, Catholic teaching provided the very basis for which Allies was needed. And the College’s own mission statement provided solid support for a group such as Allies:

*...All who share [Holy Cross’] life are challenged to be open to new ideas, to be patient with ambiguity and uncertainty, to combine a passion for truth with respect for the views of others. Informed by the presence of diverse interpretations of the human experience, Holy Cross seeks to build a community marked by freedom, mutual respect, and civility. Because the search for meaning and value is at the heart of the intellectual life, critical examination of fundamental religious and philosophical questions is integral to liberal arts education. Dialogue about these questions among people from diverse academic disciplines and religious traditions requires everyone to acknowledge and respect differences. Dialogue also requires us to remain open to that sense of the whole which calls us to transcend ourselves and challenges us to seek that which might constitute our common humanity.*

-excerpt from College of the Holy Cross Mission Statement

With the help of Chaplains Marybeth Kearns Barrett and Kim McElaney, and faculty members Jim Nickoloff, David O’Brien, and Helen Whall, we drafted a constitution that was congruent with Catholic teaching and Holy Cross’ mission statement. The Allies’ constitution focused on education, ending violence and discrimination, and creating a community where all people were treated with respect and dignity. The SGA voted before the end of that school year to give us recognition. However, when we returned to campus in September 1994, we were told that we were not allowed to have a table at the annual Extracurricular Extravaganza. While we had SGA recognition, President Gerard Reedy, SJ had yet to approve the Allies’ constitution – a step we didn’t know was required. We received recognition from Fr. Reedy in October 1994, making HC the first Catholic college, as far as I know, to recognize a group representing GLB and our allies.

For the first year of Allies, no one spoke in meetings about their own sexual orientation unless it was to affirm their heterosexuality. We spent our time educating ourselves, discussing the reality and effects of homophobia and heterosexism both on and off campus. Those of us who personally identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual were still too fearful to come out, so we spoke either in the third person, or as an ally.

On October 25, 1994, several doors in the Mulledy dormitory were vandalized with homophobic slurs and violent messages. This was labeled the “Second Mulledy Incident,” as a few weeks prior there had been racial slurs written on the walls of Mulledy. While both incidents were deliberately violent and hateful in the messages conveyed, together they served as a catalyst for various groups on campus to join together and speak out against racism, sexism, homophobia,

and all forms of discrimination and hatred. Allies, Black Student Union (BSU), Latin American Student Union (LASO), Asian Students in Action (ASIA), Bishop Healy Multicultural Society, Women's Forum, and Pax Christi held a joint rally to decry all forms of bigotry, ignorance, and violence.

These incidents forced us to look at the inter-relatedness of various forms of oppression and discrimination, and at the ways we fear difference rather than celebrate diversity. It allowed different groups on campus to come together, support each other, and begin to understand that our own liberation is dependent on the liberation of others. It empowered us to work together, celebrate together and have a larger voice than any one individual or group had on its own. In the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., we recognized that “[i]njustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

Most would have said the rally was a huge success. Even President Reedy came, which was by no means the norm. Yet that night I felt alone, voiceless, and disappointed. As the Allies' co-chair and emcee of the rally, I was front and center, probably the most visible person at the event. Members of Allies read anonymous letters written by members of the GLB support group. I, too, read a letter. My own. And as I read my anonymous, voiceless letter, I felt completely invisible.

### Coming Out

The closet was suffocating me. The burden of hiding my sexual orientation was becoming more and more unbearable as I became more comfortable with myself as a lesbian. On occasion I would travel to Boston College to meet with their unofficial GLBT student group or to attend a GLBT rights rally at the State House or to go to a mass at Dignity Boston, an inclusive and progressive community of GLBT Catholics and their allies. I began reading more about gay and lesbian history and the gay liberation movement. I helped coordinate a GLBT retreat for college-aged students along with people from Boston College, and briefly dated one of the women I met while on retreat. The more engaged I became in finding safe spaces and community, the more difficult it was to remain in the closet. Any simple question about what I did over the weekend or who I was with or what I was thinking about raised the issue of how “out” I was going to be. Every day I was faced with deciding whether to come out, cover up, or to pass as straight. Having to make that decision over and over and over again was exhausting and often quite painful. At some point, the desire to be authentic and speak in my own voice grew to be much larger than my fear of coming out.

But how exactly does one come out – particularly in an environment where no one else is out? How do I make the transition from being an outspoken “ally” and the co-chair of Allies where I had become proficient in speaking in the third person, to speaking in the first person as a lesbian?

My readiness and need to come out coincided with Holy Cross' readiness to recognize, accept, and welcome openly gay members of our community. My memory is not clear on the details of how this came about, but we planned an event as part of the campus-wide celebration of

Women's History Month entitled "Being Lesbian at Holy Cross: An Alumna and a Student Share Their Experiences." Nan O'Connor, a lesbian alumna from the class of 1984, came back to campus to talk about her experience at Holy Cross. And on March 23, 1995, Nan and I took the stage together and shared our stories.

What we had originally thought would be a talk in a classroom with about 40-50 students attending, turned into a standing-room-only event in the Hogan ballroom and its adjacent lounge with over 700 people. When I was told, just prior to walking into the ballroom, that it was overflowing, a part of me wanted to run far and fast. Why were so many people there? Why were they interested? What was their motivation? I was terrified. But then I was reminded of Brian McNaught's talk the year before, and the hundreds of people who came to hear him. They came, not to show their hatred or to judge him, but because they wanted to hear his story and to hear a perspective that, perhaps, they had never had the opportunity to hear before. With that in mind, and with support from my friends and my aunt and two cousins who were sitting, waiting for me in the ballroom, I walked with Nan onto the stage. And we told our stories.

The response I received after coming out was absolutely amazing. In the following days and weeks, I received over 200 letters, e-mails, and voicemails from students, faculty, staff, and alumni – every single one of them supportive. Some were from people who had not attended the event, whether because they didn't want anyone to assume they were gay, or because they were studying abroad. I was overwhelmed by the response, particularly by the thoughtfulness of the letters such as the following:

*"You don't know me and I don't know you, but I just have to say that just from hearing you speak, I can tell that you are a very unique person. You have more courage than I could ever dream of. I was so happy for you and proud of you tonight. You truly sang your song, and in doing so you opened my ears and eyes to a whole new world. Though my homophobia and narrow-mindedness won't change overnight, you gave me a basis on which to build a new understanding of other people; their races, their sex, their sexuality. Thank you!"* – signed by a 3<sup>rd</sup> year male student

Another letter read:

*"...It is very easy at Holy Cross to assume that everyone is similar, but this obviously is untrue. Tonight marked a landmark in both Holy Cross history and in our individual lives. You have motivated us to become part of the solution to homophobia. It is not enough to be heterosexuals willing to accept homosexuality. Rather, we must involve ourselves in helping others to realize that there is nothing wrong or demented with being gay/bisexual. We want to change our own personal behavior and actions and do our part through involving ourselves in Allies"* – signed by 3 female students

Imagine a 21 year-old student opening his mind to experiences different from his own, making himself vulnerable by acknowledging his "homophobia and narrow-mindedness," and



taking the time to sit down and write me a card. Imagine three students sitting around in their dorm room and talking about their own obligation to end discrimination and homophobia.

These letters were evidence of a profound cultural shift on campus, the seeds of which had been planted many years before I arrived in 1992. It was a shift that allowed room for a dialogue about LGBT issues and the inter-relatedness of various forms of oppression. I was able to witness and take part in this shift during my four years on campus, and it allowed me to grow intellectually, spiritually, and socially. By the time I graduated in 1996, I was no longer consumed by “the closet” and was able to focus my energy on moving forward.

I know there are still signs of homophobia and heterosexism on campus, in the form of gay “jokes,” ignorant statements, perhaps continued prank calls, graffiti and direct or indirect threats. While more and more students, faculty, and staff come out each year, many in the community remain closeted. After all, Holy Cross is part of a much larger society where prejudice and fear of difference are embedded in the culture. Fortunately, that culture is slowly but surely changing. As I look back, I see my experiences at Holy Cross to be evidence of the possibility for change when a community chooses to live in congruence with the fundamental values found in Jesuit and Catholic tradition – a tradition of respect, liberation, and love.

# **KHAKIS, BLUE JEANS, AND BAGPIPES: A GAY STUDENT'S JOURNEY TO FIND A CATHOLIC VOICE**

By Malcolm McCluskey ('99)

*[Note: When I first submitted this chapter for publication in 2009, I did so anonymously because of the treatment some Catholic school teachers were facing by coming out of the closet. I was fearful that my life would be scrutinized and that my employment as a teacher in a Catholic school would be in jeopardy. Many Catholic school employees still live with this fear. I am including my name for this edition because I've continued to be moved and inspired by the bravery of the students at Holy Cross and the amazing work they continue to do. Visibility and names are important, and it is time for me to stand by the work I did and to reclaim my name for myself.]*

It's kind of funny how time has the ability to clean things up in one's memory. When I think back at my time at Holy Cross, I have mixed feelings. I loved Holy Cross and had a wonderful experience. My professors were amazing, my classes challenged me, and I formed the most important friendships of my life. I became the adult I am today because of all of these important elements. I also became the adult I am today because of the negative experiences I had. Being gay at Holy Cross came with its ups and downs. When I attended Holy Cross, Allies had just begun, ABiGaLe was organized and approved, and more students found the courage to come out of the closet. Because of this increased presence, more people were forced to recognize the needs of gay, lesbian and bisexual students at the college. I think it was an amazing period of growth for the college community, but it did not come without its growing pains. Acts of homophobia and hate speech were seen more throughout the campus, but so was the outcry of the community. I seemed to forget some of these experiences over time, and I think I even tried to minimize them in my mind. Even though I had these experiences, I do not want the negative experiences to define my time at Holy Cross. As a gay student at the school during this time, I think I became a stronger person.

*Bustin' out!*

I was so excited to go to Holy Cross. I was my first choice of schools, and I could not wait to get a brand new start on life. I had it all planned out. I could leave the life I was living behind and not so much recreate myself, but I could finally be honest with who I was. I could finally come out of the closet and not have to worry about this news being the topic of discussion around the town. I had already started the process of coming out back home, but I still did not actually come out. Instead of telling my friends that I was gay, I would say something like, "I think I'm gay, but I'm not sure." I am sure my friends had already started wondering because I never dated anyone for more than a month at a time, and I would quickly change the subject anytime discussions would direct themselves towards girls, relationships, and or sex. Going away to college was finally going to give me the chance to be who I was and share this newly understood part of my identity with others. I had no idea how or when this was going to happen, but the distance from home was going to help me deal the fear I was experiencing in my hometown.

My first day on campus was the same typical, crazy first day that all people probably remember. My parents and I pulled up to the dorm, and the orientation leaders, RAs and other campus staff attacked the car and helped haul all of my stuff to my room. As we lugged the duffle bags, bedding and milk crates filled with school supplies, extension cords and those other essential items college students think they must have to survive the year, I noticed a peculiar sticker on the bulletin boards hanging outside some of the rooms. It was a white sticker with a upside-down, red triangle in the center with the word ALLY written across it. Written in the corners of the sticker were the words "Safe Person, Safe Space." I knew the meaning of the pink triangle and the rainbow, but I had never seen a red triangle before. I assumed that it had something to do with something gay and made a mental note to get to the bottom of that as soon as I was more comfortable at the school. The most important thing for me to do at this point was to make some friends, get a feel for the school and adapt to life away from home.

The adjustment to college life was not too difficult. The classes were challenging, dorm life was fun, and I was making tons of new friends. I was enjoying the freedom that came with this transition in life. I had not come out to any of my new friends yet, and I could not shake the idea from my mind. It seemed that everywhere I went I saw those ALLY stickers. The more I saw them, the more I knew they were meant to make people like me feel safe, and I did. I don't know if these people knew how important those stickers were for a young gay student, but just seeing these stickers calmed my nerves. It was not like I was going to approach someone with some of those stickers outside their door and come out to them, but I knew that this was a person who would not judge or reject me, and that was my greatest fear. I also started to notice an ad placed in the daily bulletin about an anonymous support group for gay, lesbian, and bisexual (LGB) students. I remember feeling my stomach drop every time I read this ad. I knew I had to call the number listed next to the ad, but I did not have the courage, and I would always tell myself that I would call the number the following week or when the time was right. The time never seemed to be right though.

A few weeks into the school year, I attended the Activities Fair in the Hogan Ballroom. I was slightly overwhelmed by the number of people and organizations, but made my way around the sea of groups with some guys from my hall. I saw the Allies table and circled the room a number of times and each time stopping at a table in the general vicinity of Allies. Even though it was an alliance for gay and straight people, I knew that just by signing my name people would suspect I was gay, and I was not ready to deal with the coming out process. At one point in the evening, I separated from my friends and made my way back to the area where the Allies table was located. As I was hovering around the area faking interest in the tables to the side of Allies, one of the members of Allies sitting behind the table started a conversation with me. This was the just what I was waiting for. I do not know if I would have approached the table directly if someone had not engaged in a conversation with me, but by initiating the conversation, this person presented me with the opportunity I was waiting for. Our conversation was not long, but they told me about Allies and their excitement about this new group on campus. They invited me to sign up for the group, and I did.

I went to the first Allies meeting of the year and immediately felt at home. I remember looking at the filled room in Hogan and feeling a sense of relief. I knew that in that room was someone I could turn to if I needed help coming out. At one of the first meetings of the year, two more

students came out of the closet, and I remembered wanting to do the same, but I didn't have the courage. It would not be long after though that I would come out to some of the friends I had made at Allies.

Throughout that time, I had been talking with my friends from home and even some teachers I had come out to before moving to college. They cautioned me not to rush into things. They were all concerned I would have a negative experience, and they wanted to make sure I had the support at school that I needed to take this major step. It was settled, I had to tell someone at Holy Cross.

### *Support Group*

At some point in the first few weeks of school, I started to hang out with a few people from Allies. I felt very comfortable and safe around them. One night I was smoking a cigarette outside of the Lehy, and one of these friends came over to visit a friend. They saw me smoking and we started to talk. It was here that I came out to her. I remember my heart racing as I uttered the words, "Well, I'm gay." She was great, and seemed to be excited at the news. Never have I had that kind of response. We discussed the usual details: whether or not I was out to my family, if my roommate knew, who I was comfortable talking to about this. At some point she suggested that I attend the Support Group the Chaplains Office ran. Besides calling the number listed in the daily bulletin, I had no idea how to involve myself with this group. I was not ready to call a random number and talk to someone I did not know. Instead, I ended up coming out to a member of the Allies executive board and asked her how I would go about attending the support group. I had no clue that she was a member of the group, and she offered to take me to the next meeting. Having someone I knew present made things so much easier.

I have to admit I was a little hesitant to attend the support group at first because I assumed that because it was run through the Chaplains Office, I would be told that I was called to live the celibate life and that gay relationships were sinful. I had no clue how wrong I was. I was greeted with nothing but love, acceptance, and there was no judgment passed on any member of the group. There were probably seven or eight people present at the meeting. I was not surprised to see some of the support group members there. I had noticed their presence at an Allies meeting, and some had already identified themselves to be gay at a recent Allies meeting. I was shocked to discover that there was someone on my floor present. I was so excited to learn this. Even though he was a few years older, I knew I had someone in the dorm I could turn to for advice. It didn't hurt that he was super cute as well.

The support group quickly became a major part of my life at Holy Cross. From the first meeting I attended to the last meeting of my senior year, I think I only missed one meeting. It was that important to me. It was a special hour reserved for us to share with each other our struggles and frustrations, as well as our excitement and relief. We helped each other come out to our families, we worked to deal with issues of homophobia on campus, we shared our excitement when we met a new boyfriend or girlfriend, and we helped each other deal with painful breakups. I do not know if I would have been able to handle life at Holy Cross without this group. This was the safest and most comfortable space I had throughout my four years at Holy Cross. The support group helped me to empower myself, and became the most important group for me throughout my college experience.

While I had been a member and leader of a number of different campus groups, support group was a place I could go to once a week and I knew that Mary Beth Kearns-Barrett would always be there, even if only one or two of us showed. She was there. She was the constant source of love and acceptance that most of us were longing for from our own friends and families.

### *ABiGaLe*

As my time continued at the school, more and more people came out of the closet. Only one person had come out publically before I enrolled in the school. By the end of my first year, there were at least six or seven student who were out. In my sophomore year, more students who came out, and those of us who were out began to see the need for a group to serve GLB community. While Allies served the college community in an educational capacity, GLB students needed a group that would advocate for this specific community. If there were acts of homophobia on campus, the GLB community needed an organization in place that would act as a voice for the community to protect the needs of all GLB students, especially if they were not able to speak for themselves because they were not out.

We started to hold meetings to discuss how we would go about forming this group. Because we were at a Catholic school, we knew that this would be an uphill battle. Surprisingly, the process did not take as long as we expected. Some Catholic colleges and universities had been trying to years to get their GLB groups recognized by the administration. It took us about a year and a half. In that time, we invited as many people as we could into the dialogue about the need for this group. We had round table discussions with professors in the Religious Studies Department, members of the Chaplains Office, Student Government Co-Chairs, members of the Jesuit community and some members of the administration. Members of Allies and GLB students who were out also took part in these conversations. We wrote letters, attended rallies, drafted petitions and sought the support of other multi-cultural student groups. I'm not sure what the deciding factor(s) were for the administration to recognize ABiGaLe as a student organization, but I do think the fact that more students were coming out of the closet only helped our cause. These students helped put human faces to the group making it easier for people to see the need for GLB students to have representation and recognition at the college. When I received word that ABiGaLe was approved, I felt a huge weight removed from my life. We did it. We helped change the face of our college, and I hopefully made life safer and easier for future GLB students.

### *Homophobia rears its ugly head, again.*

While I try to only focus on the positive experiences I had at Holy Cross, it is hard to ignore the negative ones. Some students at Holy Cross were less than welcoming to gay and lesbian students. They used hateful language and made no attempt to apologize for their homophobic attitudes and behavior. Most of these students seemed to feel as if their actions were justified, and they put the blame on the gay and lesbian students.

The first homophobic incident I remember was around National Coming Out Day of my first year. Allies was sponsoring a Blue Jeans Day to show support for LGB students. There are a number of different explanations of the purpose and symbolism of this day, but for the most part, it was a day to show support and solidarity for LGB students. I remember being excited about this day, and I

couldn't wait to see how many people were going to participate. I remember hearing guys on my hall talk about this day. Some responded in a positive way and others said that they were going to wear khaki pants that day. I did not understand their resistance to this day, and no amount of discussion was going to change their minds. I made my typical mental note when I heard a friend or acquaintance would make a homophobic comment-- Don't come out to him/her.

When the day arrived, I was going to throw myself into the spirit of the day, and I wore denim overalls (I have to admit here that I am completely embarrassed not only to have owned overalls, but yes, I also wore them in public). Since most students wore jeans on a daily basis, I was not surprised to see students in jeans. What surprised me the most was the number of faculty, staff, and administrators in blue jeans that day. It was awesome to see that level of support. While most people at the school took the opportunity to show their support for gay, lesbian and bisexual students, others felt it was their duty to voice and or demonstrate their disapproval of the day. Some organized "Khaki Day" in opposition, and still others took it further. At lunch that day I heard that a student was wearing a t-shirt that read, "Silly faggot. Dicks are for chicks."

Blue jeans day always seemed to bring out the best and worst of people. In my senior year, announcements for Blue jeans day brought about a new round of homophobia. A mass email was sent by a student who broke into another student's email account. The email consisted of the words, "I am gay." This started a campus-wide email war among the students. Students from Allies and ABiGaLe responded explaining how no one should joke in this way, and that they found emails such as this to be insensitive and homophobic. Other students responded by telling these gay and lesbian students to in essence, "get over it." Some gay students also took it upon themselves to engage in individual email exchanges with these students. As I read all of these emails, I could not believe what I was reading. I was beginning to question whether or not Allies or ABiGaLe was having a positive impact on the campus. If we were, then how could these exchanges be taking place? Most of these exchanges took place before the long Columbus Weekend, and I was hoping that long weekend would help put an end to the madness. I was wrong.

I came home from the Spiritual Exercises and saw the voicemail light blinking on my phone. My mailbox was practically full of messages from students asking me how we were going to respond to the email and the news about the student from the University of Wyoming. I had no clue what was going on until I checked my email and saw that another student sent another campus-wide email. In the subject line of the email, he wrote, "Top 10 Reasons to be Heterosexual." In the email, the student listed and described some of the most bigoted, stereotypical views on homosexuality implying not only that we had a choice to be gay, lesbian or bisexual, but that we were in some way responsible for our own discrimination and ridicule. Among the "reasons to be heterosexual" were "our parents love us, our jobs are not limited to figure skating and body waxing, and AIDS was not our fault." I could not believe what I was reading. Who in their right mind would think these things let alone write them in an email to the entire campus community? I knew that the author of this email wanted to be that "funny guy." It was also at this time that I learned of the death of Matthew Sheppard.

I don't really know how to describe how I felt during this time. I was in disbelief of both the events in Wyoming and on our own campus. I don't remember feeling scared or fearing for my safety, but

I do remember feeling a great deal of anxiety as a result of these events. I had a difficult time sleeping, eating made me nauseous, and I could not focus in my classes. Members of ABiGaLe organized a protest outside Kimball where we marched with members of the faculty voicing our disgust over the emails.

I remember the emails and Matthew Sheppard's death being the subject of our conversations at support group for a few weeks. Marybeth continued her unending support and compassion for the GLB students during this time. She tried to comfort us and remind us that the opinions of a few students did not reflect the opinions and feelings of the majority of the school. She wanted to organize a prayer vigil outside of St. Joseph Chapel as a sign of the college's support for and solidarity with GLB students.

The afternoon of the vigil was one of those cold, windy, biting Worcester afternoons, but it did not keep a few hundred students, faculty and staff from attending. I remember the vigil beginning with a bagpipe player and a song from a few students. The community assembled prayed together that evening for an end to the injustices experienced by GLB students. As I stood at the top of the Chapel steps waiting to speak, I looked out at all the people gathered. I saw all of my friends, some of my professors, and members of the Chaplains Office standing in the cold to show their support for GLB students. I was overwhelmed and moved by this simple and public sign of support. After weeks of reading homophobic emails, seeing this kind of support was a huge relief and symbol of hope for me. That afternoon I listened to the Acting President of the school and the Vice President for Student Affairs spoke out stating that there was no place for intolerance at Holy Cross. One of the student government co-chairs also spoke of the need to be an Ally to GLB students. Fr. Jim Hayes also spoke of God's never ending love and compassion for all. That evening, I had the opportunity to stand and speak with two people I looked up to and admired for their strength and courage, Prof. Jim Nickoloff and Jeannie Seidler. As members of the GLB community, we spoke about our experiences at Holy Cross and the need to come together and stand up against homophobia, ignorance, and hatred. When the vigil ended, I can remember going into the crowd of people to exchange the sign of peace and being embraced by all those who attended. This night was one of the most memorable and definitive nights of my experience at Holy Cross. In the actions of all the people present at the vigil, I saw how love could overpower hate, and I knew then that the college would not tolerate any act of homophobia that took place in the future.

### *Individual acts*

During my junior year (1997-1998), I had one of the most shocking and negative experiences while I was a student at Holy Cross. It was a weekend night, and I was hanging out with some friends in Mulledy Hall. We decided that we would crash one of the semi-formal dances in the Hogan Ballroom, but on our way we noticed some students outside of Hanselman with an opened container. Since my friend and I were both RA's, we felt that we had a responsibility to ask them to pour out the contents of the can. My friend politely identified herself as an RA and asked the young woman to pour out her beer on her way into the dorm. This young woman was with a male student who started to give my friend a difficult time, so I decided to step in to assist her. The young man and I exchanged some heated words and as we both started to walk away, he called me a fag. I do not know whether or not he knew that I was gay, but I remember feeling a mixture of anger and fear



rise within me. I knew I had to respond. He had to know that he could not call someone that word. I told him that I was gay and that I took great offense to his use of that word. He did not seem to comprehend what I was saying, so I repeated myself and told him that I was gay and I was offended by that word. He responded, "So. What do you want me to do...rape you?" I was frozen solid and stunned by what this kid just said. My stomach sank and I felt nauseous.

My friend told him to get inside immediately. We didn't know what to do. It had all happened so fast and we did not get this kid's name. I wanted to do something, so we spoke with some of the Complex Directors, and I called Kim McElaney from the Chaplain's office to seek guidance.

I remember looking through that year's First-Year Facebook with my friend who witnessed the event to find this student. If we could not find the kid who verbally assaulted me, we were hoping to find the friend he was with that night. When we got near the end of the book, I wondered if we had any chance of finding him. This was not necessarily the best way to track this guy down. I remember turning the page and seeing his picture. My stomach fell and my heart started to beat faster and faster. I started to feel nauseous again. I knew this was the kid. I did not realize this at the time, but I started to have a series of anxiety and panic attacks that night, and these would last throughout the rest of my time at Holy Cross.

I could not focus on much else the rest of the weekend. I was afraid to run into this kid in Kimball. I had pretty much lost my appetite and avoided most public places. I don't know exactly what I was afraid of, but I think I was anxious about filing the report. I was also nervous that I would see this student either alone or with his friends. I thought that if I saw him again, he would call me a fag and possibly harm me physically. I had learned that he was a member of the football team and wondered if by filing a report I would invite harassment by his teammates. That weekend I spoke with anyone who might offer guidance and support. I spoke to friends, other RA's, and some of the gay and lesbian students on campus. After a great deal of thought and prayer, I decided to file an official incident report.

That Monday morning I filed the report with the Office for Student Affairs and met with the Assistant Dean of Student Affairs. I gave him my account of the incident, and he said that would follow up with the student. We also went over the possible actions I could take. One possibility was to take it to a judiciary board, which was explained as being kind of like an arbitration hearing. We would both tell our sides of the incident, and then the board would make a decision on the case. My other option would be a peer mediation where the two of us would meet and discuss the incident. The Assistant Dean told me to think about the decision, and we would talk soon to make the necessary arrangements.

I was convinced that I should take this issue to a judicial board. I remember feeling that a case like this could set a precedent for the future incidents. If another student experienced harassment like this, there would be record of a similar case. If a decision was made in my favor, it would send a message to the campus community that behavior like this would not be tolerated at Holy Cross. I also felt that I would receive justice in a sense for the wrong that had been committed.

When I told the Assistant Dean about my decision, he informed me that he met with the student, and that the student admitted to everything I mentioned in the report. He also said that the student

desired to participate in the peer mediation session. I thought to myself, of course this kid wants this. This is the easy way out. The Assistant Dean started to walk me through the peer mediation process and helped me see the value in it. I would have someone there to support me, he would be there, and the offending student would also have someone there. He said that the young man really wanted to talk with me to clear things up. The Assistant Dean told me to think some more about this and get back to him soon.

I turned to the support group and the Chaplain's office for guidance on this. The students in the support group said they would support any decision I made and just wanted me to feel comfortable with the decision. Kim McElaney offered me a different way to view the situation. She challenged me to look at the situation in a different way. I remember her telling me that this was a step to live out the Gospel message of reconciliation and an opportunity for conversion. This made sense to me. I also started to think about the possible repercussions of a judicial board hearing. What would happen if the board did not find in my favor? If they did find in my favor, would the offending student resent all gay students and continue making harassing statements? All of these thoughts flooded my mind. I could not focus on anything and my panic and anxiety attacks did not go away. I couldn't sleep and forget about eating. I think I lost about 10 pounds during this period of around two weeks, and this is something I could not afford.

Kim called my class dean for me and told her about the difficulties I was going through. The dean was very supportive and called my professors to inform them of the experience I had, and they were amazing. Each pulled me aside and offered any kind of support they could give me. This helped take some of the pressure off of my shoulders, but I still had to make my decision. Shortly after my meeting with Kim, I called The Assistant Dean of Student Affairs and told him that I would attend the peer mediation and the date was set. At this time he told me that he had instructed the offending student to write a report on homosexuality, homophobia and its effects on LGB students.

The days preceding the meeting brought more anxiety attacks and lack of sleep. It would be the first time I would face this student since the night of the incident. At this point, I just wanted to get this thing over with. The day finally arrived. I remember walking into the mediation where Kim, the Assistant Dean, the other student and I met. My heart was racing as I told him how the event affected me. I was shocked that he did not get defensive. In fact, he was open to all I had to say and offered a sincere apology. He also told me that he called his uncle for help on the paper the Assistant Dean had him write. His uncle was a physician, and he felt that he could get some information and direction from his uncle. In their conversation, his uncle came out to him. I could not think of a better outcome. At the end of the mediation, we shook hands and went our own ways.

This experience taught me a number of things. It taught me how to rise above hate and anger. It also taught me how to depend on the support of the community around me. Even though the remarks of hate and anger from this student were repeated in my mind, they were unable to overpower the voices of support from my friends, professors, and members of the administration.

### *Final Thoughts*

I had a few other run-ins with homophobia where people would call me “fag” under their breath or mock me or other GLB students with jokes or by writing graffiti on people’s doorways, but none impacted me like the experience described above. In these other experiences, I wish I could say the outcomes were the same, but they were not. Mostly, students would roll their eyes when they were confronted about their homophobic attitudes or actions, and many just dismissed their actions by saying that they were just kidding. It just proved to me that we had more work to do.

I don’t want people to walk away from this essay and think my experience at Holy Cross was a negative one filled with anxiety and frustration. When most people ask me about my college experience, I usually respond by saying how much I loved my time at Holy Cross. It is not because I am trying to forget all of the hardships and frustrations I had as a gay student. It is because my time at Holy Cross taught me how a community can be transformed by the people in that community. When I first stepped on campus, only one person had publically come out of the closet. By the time I graduated, there were over 25 students who were out and proudly declared it to the campus community. The more people came out, the more faces were given to the GLB community at Holy Cross, and this helped to transform the community from one that was labeled to be one of the most homophobic campuses in the country to one that was on the cutting edge of Catholic colleges and universities in the country. This transformation did not happen without the love and support of the straight Allies to the GLB community. It was through the support and love of my straight friends that I never felt alone or isolated as a student. They attended every rally, signed every petition, led and organized prayer services and vigils, wore t-shirts and denim, and spoke out against acts of homophobia. They helped me find the strength to be vocal as I was during my time on the hill.

Now I face a new struggle which is why I have to write this essay anonymously. I work in a Catholic high school as a religion teacher. While the teachings of the Church are clear that the GLB person should not be discriminated against, some members of the Church do not think that a gay person is an appropriate model of faith for young adults. This has caused me to be more cautious when sharing information about my life with others. I do not want to bring any unneeded attention to my school that could have a negative effect on the community. I also love my job and do not want to do anything that would cause me to lose my job or prevent me from gaining employment in the future. I continue to do the work I started at Holy Cross, but in a more discrete way. I can say that based on my work as a high school teacher and from what I hear my students say and feel about issues regarding GLB persons, I have a great deal of hope in our future.

## GAY BOSNIAN MUSLIM CRUSADER

By Rusmir Musić ('01)

Gay Bosnian Muslim Refugee. Not a typical opening sentence for a story taking place at the College of the *Holy Cross*. I'm certain that my English Professor Helen Whall might point out that my "sentence" has no proper verb or object, only a subject. I happen to be that subject. Like a beaker enclosing a particularly dramatic organic chemistry reaction full of changing colors, those four seemingly innocent elements hold together memories of an equally dramatic identity formation taking place in the late 90s on Mt. St. James. Fresh "off the boat" from native Bosnia and Herzegovina, I showed up in Hanselman residence hall with bad hair, bad fashion, utterly unaware of my impending transfiguration. As an outward reflection of a changing inner identity, the hair would eventually progress from platinum blonde to black to blue, from long to short to spikes that once poked an eye of a girl sitting next to me after the Decades' Dance. It was an exciting era: Student Government was approving ABiGaLe; a million queer people marched on DC; *Will and Grace* introduced gay characters on network TV; while *Queer as Folk* educated us about rimming. The period was equally challenging: homophobic incidents occurred on campus yearly; online forums proclaimed there was no place for gays on a Catholic campus; and friends confessed to trying to take their lives rather than face their sexuality.

While "Gay Bosnian Muslim Refugee"<sup>1</sup> summed up my experience then, the perspective of the decade since distills my transformation at Holy Cross into three new concepts – identity, activism, and friendships.

I am often amazed how many students enroll at Holy Cross unprepared for their own identity transformation. I have watched friends who had chosen the Cross as a hiding place start peeking through the closet door as their hetero foundation faced questioning in academic and social settings. As it turns out, our small, conservative college was not so conservative after all! I credit the First-Year Program, professors as mentors, class discussions examining core beliefs, and the interplay between conservative and liberal thought as catalysts that I have not witnessed on other campuses. My identity and activism overlap here: I recall the commotion surrounding ABiGaLe's founding having steered many life-altering conversations (often in the form of heated exchanges over Kimball chicken fingers). The starting ingredients sometimes produced volatile reactions, as family, religion, and perceptions of one's gender role, combined explosively with sexuality exploration. I had mixed feelings hearing, "I envy your coming out process," because my identity formed almost exclusively at school, without outside influences. More or less financially independent, with family far away, raised in a secular environment – I may have been "lucky," but I tried supporting those having a harder time defining themselves on their own terms. That I came out within a supportive friendship network is perhaps my greatest blessing (well, *after* surviving the genocide).

<sup>1</sup> Of course, the terms themselves have changed their meaning. While I use the word *gay* here, I think of myself as queer, as the latter word allows more flexibility for both gender and sexuality, ambiguity, and subversiveness. My religious affiliation is likewise complicated, resulting in a complex theology compiled from academic discussions and literary inspiration. After 13 years of living in the States, I am now considered American when I go home, though my lack of US citizenship reminds me sorely that I am indeed still Bosnian.

Reading *Gay New York*, I recently realized I did not so much come out of a closet, as did come *into* myself and the society. The closet simply disintegrated about a month into freshman year. I kissed a boy. I liked it. And a chain of events set off that would land me on the front page of the *New York Times* my senior year. I always did love to kiss and tell.

My saga begins in August 1997 on the Knight's Limo from Logan airport. During the ride, I decided NOT to be gay. I plotted to finally try the Rusmir-on-girl kiss that should have happened at prom with my "girlfriend" (we connected online recently – she's now a lesbian; ironically, I am now infamous for kissing women at parties). I was landing in Boston from San Francisco, where I finished high school through a program sending Bosnian students to the US. My family had fled Bosnia in 1992 and spent the next 4 years in Croatia, 10 of us packed in a dilapidated house and living off Red Cross rations. I knew I was attracted to boys, but having one's sexual development interrupted by war tends to delay further inquiry. The complete lack of privacy in Croatia made me retreat into homework; my short time in San Francisco wasn't enough to help me overcome my fears. And so my queer muse, as it were, turned out to be Hanselman 2, the second floor of the First-Year Program residence hall. Any of my HC friends will testify there was something in those water fountains! So many important events happened within those institutional walls that I'm compelled to identify Hanselman as the single most important factor in my identity formation. Amidst cinder blocks and 60s furniture, next to Clarence Thomas' supposed college room, I came of age.

Hanselman is where I socialized and intellectualized with others who shared my FYP classes. Hanselman is where I was voted Publicity Chair by singing Madonna's "You Must Love Me." There I met Gary who forever changed how I view backrubs and provided that "a-ha" moment that named my feelings. My sophomore roommate made it so comfortable to tell him I was gay (bisexual at the time, of course) that I never doubted his acceptance. In late-night conversations, I whispered my secret to trusted friends, and a group of them whispered theirs back. We bonded together in a time of activist turmoil around ABiGaLe, and in Hanselman *gay* forever fused with *activist*.

Though I do not have a memory of this event, several reliable witnesses confirm I once screamed I was gay running through my freshman hallway. Then, I came out in a campus-wide email following homophobic remarks sent over the network. I came out to my family during *Seinfeld*, suddenly realizing the setting was as good as any, since I'd never be able to orchestrate the perfect moment. I came out to the world in an edition of the *New York Times*, whose journalist – despite an in-depth conversation on variety of topics – focused exclusively on my more flamboyant aspects. Though the College's Public Relations nominated me for the *Times*' contest for the "nation's outstanding graduates," not a mention of the article subsequently appeared in any school publication. Always the College's poster boy for diversity and academic excellence (I was also profiled in the Admissions *Viewbook*), the school could never fully embrace the first element of the "Gay Bosnian Muslim Refugee" identity equation. I may have come out of the closet, but Holy Cross was still deeply in there. It is then heartening to see how far we have come, producing an entire book of LGBT stories from the Hill. "Vindicated," I believe, is the feeling.

When they get bitchy and cranky, the Democrats usually lose; LGBT activists at Holy Cross face a similar fortune. In my activist career, I learned that giving into anger only produced more hurt. I joined ABiGaLe inspired by the rallies and testimonials, and rose through the ranks as eventual Co-Chair. Simultaneously, I educated the larger community as a Resident Assistant. As homophobic incidents appeared every year, I wonder in retrospect why we were always caught by surprise. Freshman year: ABiGaLe's recognition stirs spirits into reactions both positive and shockingly negative. Sophomore year: "Top Ten Reasons to be Heterosexual" hits the email network, provoking ferocious, angry exchanges. Junior year: homophobes target a friend's room in Clark with graffiti and even trash. Senior year: Daily Jolt, an online forum, is flooded with responses to Rainbow Alliance Week programming, ranging from hurtful ("you won't get a job after graduation, so why bother"), to ludicrous ("gays should be encouraged to come out and pair off so they don't pass on the gay gene").

How I wish I could say that the Holy Cross administration stood by its gay students, unequivocally defending our right to live and learn alongside others. Aside from the Chaplains and the handful faculty and staff supporters and mentors, it often felt like a battle just to get a friendly ear. It's ultimately pointless debating which administrators were supportive or not – their learning curve was probably as steep as the students'. The feeling of having to do it alone *was* our reality. While the activism gave me incredible skills, resilience, and depth of self-understanding, it was unfair that the brunt of educating, advocating, and counseling fell on student leaders. Acting President Vellaccio disregarded the "Top Ten" incident as a simple abuse of email, adding that he no longer wanted to hear about it. Burned by this message, I marched myself to the Dean of Students Office following the Daily Jolt episode, demanding that Allies and ABiGaLe leaders proofread the community letter about to be sent. "Don't you trust that the administration would do the right thing?" Dean Peterson asked. In one of the most awkward pauses of my life, I had to declare, "No, frankly, I don't."

Junior year taught me how a community can respond to crises. Outraged that a gay student was being singled out and targeted in his own living space, we did not resort to anger. Rather than fume, we organized a 72 hour vigil in Clark, where anyone could talk, meditate, pray, and express thoughts on a quilt of felt panels. The community relied on our straight allies to help us come together and heal, rather than simply rage. As a result, the general feeling was one of optimism, not paralyzing frustration.

I was shocked when a current gay Crusader told me in an online chat that ABiGaLe should now disband. The shock resulted from imagining a timeline void of students championing for greater acceptance. Then, I realized that times have changed. Holy Cross may have ways to go, but the new generation has to find its own activism. With a short supply of gay students, I worry about how many have the skills necessary to lead – we are still not taught leadership in the classroom. As a concerned alum, I battle my impulses to intervene and to let go. Letting go of Holy Cross has always been hard for me.

I have already mentioned that discovering a group of caring friends was one of my greatest blessings – I heavily relied on them during times of need. In the space where friendships and identity overlap, these individuals influenced who I was becoming. Mostly, it was liberating to feel supported. However, I could devote an entire paper to analyzing how the LGBT community freaked out at the news I was dating my best friend, who happened to be a girl.

While we certainly wanted some shock value, our complex friendship meant that *dating* was real for us. Our word choice has been vociferously dismissed countless times, but I insist that all be allowed the chance to name their own feelings and experiences. Witnessing the aggressive assertion of closed identity boxes rather than a sexuality spectrum makes me wonder what chances I would have taken had a specific role not been assigned to me.

I still do not fully comprehend how my inner circle wound up all queer – which friendships were pre-destined and which happenstance? Sure, my friends' sexualities ranged from bisexual to bisexual-until-graduation to gay. However, when I learned that two "straight" male friends had hooked up, I experienced a panic attack in the basement of the Chemistry building from a sudden realization that not a single close friend of mine was honest-to-God hetero. Should I blame the gay water in Hanselman? My involvement with the Alternate College Theatre? After all, the bet is still out how many of the 12 brothers in *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* were a bit light in their dancing shoes. Was it the hours that went into campus activism, educating and counseling that put me into close proximity of specific individuals? Or was it clubbing at A-Men or ManRay, exhilarated that we finally found others like us? The feelings of dancing with someone of the same gender, free of consequences, can be a powerful force, but it's even more powerful having someone trusted to share it with.

The going-out phone calls would start Thursdays around 9pm. I would be rushing back from an ACT rehearsal, trying to watch *Will & Grace* while ironing my black pants and disco shirt (one would not dream of wearing jeans to a club in Boston at that time). I'd orchestrate driving arrangements, and as everyone assembled in my Alumni suite, I would declare someone's outfit unacceptable, someone else's hair atrocious, and pull together some last-minute Carson Kressley magic. I am still bewildered by the mechanics – nay, magic – of squeezing a 6'2, solidly built man into one of my small-sized shirts. Once in the club, I'd encourage my fellow revelers to line up on the dance platform, only to take a step back and chuckle that here, at last, was Holy Cross at its finest.

My identity evolved with my changing role in the group. As an underclassman, I was in awe of the queer upperclass students. The ones I met as a freshman were battle-weary cool, having just convinced the administration that students were not, in fact, going to spontaneously erupt into orgies accompanied by choruses of screaming drag queens simply because ABiGaLe was allowed its spot under the sun. A cohort returning from study abroad with stories of fabulous Europe created, in my sophomore year, a fierce diva-off moment during the Masquerade Ball (which we were not allowed to call Drag Ball, lest those drag queens started singing orgies into existence). Anyone who witnessed Maleficent vs. Snow White's Evil Queen surely must still feel chills thinking about it. In my junior year, I accepted the social leadership mantle. Sure, I had already been recruiting for ABiGaLe – in Hanselman, of course – but my Alumni 18 RA suite brought the group together. That's where we held our gay movie nights, played never-have-I-ever, and philosophized late at night over candles (sorry, Residence Life). We bonded in our 15 passenger van to the Millennium March for LGBT rights in DC, swept up in elation, empowerment, and hormones of another million marching with us. By my senior year, I had become the *Big Gay Mother*. My roommate and I crammed three couches into my new RA suite – in Hanselman, of course – and made it comfortable for folks gay or straight to hang out and learn from each other, whether it be about God, Chemistry, or sexuality. I realized



the person I wanted to be – a fabulous host who inspires discussion, social action, and juicy gossip sharing.

Gay Crusaders of my generation faced a choice: hide our identity by mixing in with the dominant J. Crew hues or come out as fluorescent amongst the pastels. I'd like to say I *chose* to let my true colors shine through and burn bright, but I wonder how much of my decision-making was conscious and how much pre-determined, what roles I was assigned and what roles I chose to play, what access being flamboyant brought and what doors it closed. For many students, *gay* was all that they saw or chose to see of me. One of my suitemates told me of his own sexuality being questioned at a party, simply due to association with me. Sometimes, I envied those who were closeted – they seemed to surreptitiously find each other at parties and have a somewhat active sex life without any of the burdens of being out. Signing into AOL chat rooms (remember those?), a friend would be blocked as soon as he revealed he was out on campus. At times, I resented my *Big Gay Mother* nickname, realizing I was always viewed as a counselor and a friend, never as a romantic interest. I often joke that Holy Cross made me who I am today – single and bitter about it. Even as a group, we struggled with making our homosexuality just a part of our collective identity, intentionally engaging in non-gay activities (like bowling), or having meetings where we shared non-gay personal facts. Being gay at Holy Cross could be so consuming that conversations would sometime go like this: "I'm tired of talking about gay things. Let's talk about art." "Art – who's Art? Is he gay?" Now and then, we took the crow bar to the closet to "help" others come out. Despite staging a one-act play centered around Madonna's "Absolutely No Regrets" creed, I regret giving into frustrations with those we knew were queer but would not say it, rather than patiently granting them identity space. In a way, I think we just wanted more company.

Yet even with all my trials and tribulations, I confess feeling sorry for those who chose to stay in their closet on the Hill. I acknowledge this un-PC attitude running counter to my proclamation that everyone comes out on his/her own timeline. I have already apologized for trying to break someone else's closet door without permission, and continue to be well-aware of stereotypes and even attacks for public admission of one's queer sexuality. Yet, I cannot help but feel that the closeted students missed being a part of something bigger. It was (and remembering it still is) such an incredible high to sing the Alma Mater at the Central Square pizza place, following a night of clubbing. The excitement of being subversive, of making change, of helping friends grow into their own skin, of living fully ... to each his own, I guess, but I know my life would be poorer without these experiences.

Today, I wonder a how well-adjusted but slightly flamboyant, normative<sup>2</sup> but cool queer role model influenced Holy Cross students' identity formation, gay or straight. I chuckle trying to imagine my residents' impressions of their crazy queer RA who hosted Czech porn discussion nights, *and* corrected their science homework, *and* always tried to be inclusive and understanding. Appearing at homecoming shortly after graduation, I implored one of the "new gays" that he needed to lead the new generation, as the one cool guy left. That he eventually did rise to the occasion, making it one of my proudest moments, made me realize I also want to be the kind of person that empowers others.

<sup>2</sup> One of the effects of a Master's in gender studies is my refusal to use the word *normal*.

My feelings are best summarized in a Brian McNaught video we used to play during Safe Space workshops. Brian asks straight workshop participants to close their eyes and imagine living in a gay world. I administered Safe Space enough times to have memorized it, and it goes something like this: “You’re on a gay bus, being driven by a gay bus driver, and you’re singing a gay song: ‘I’m gay, I’m gay, I’m gay.’ I’m gay, I’m gay, I’m gay.” “How do you feel? And whom do you tell how you feel?” Brian asks the straight audience to reflect. I feel incredibly lucky that my answers are “I feel great” and “Would telling these 50 people attending my party be enough?”

## Epilogue

The question of origins of homosexuality – nature vs. nurture – has been debated to death, but I always felt there was a third option. I consider my sexuality a gift – from that *something* we can call the divine, the universe, karma, Dust – that brought me closer to others. In some ways limited, but in many more much more open, the liminal space that I travel allows me to push more, express more, be more. I am allowed to hug, kiss, touch, talk in ways that at times seem astonishingly daring. With humbleness, I acknowledge feeling that I *have* helped others, and that helping others was what I was put on Earth for.

It’s an incredible feeling staring at something I can only describe as a validation of my life’s work. Taking a shortcut back from a beautiful wedding ceremony at St. Joseph’s Chapel, I stumbled upon a time portal to almost a decade earlier. In the Gesso space in the basement of Hogan, an exhibit of RAW Art stared at me with the weight of the past and the promise of the future. Memory: brainstorming the name Rainbow Alliance Week. Feeling: gladness that the name and the concept survived the test of time. Memory: the first RAW Words, performing a medley of Madonna lyrics to unsuspecting passers-by at Cool Beans. Feeling: here are pieces of my legacy. Realization: could that be the quilt we made a decade ago, with all its pain and its call for healing?

And there, in an unmistakable writing of my 21 year old self, in puffy paint and felt, a message “Join Hands in Love” wrapped around an outline of two hands labeled “Rusmir” and “Bethie.” It’s often been said that I’m such a softie, I would cry at AT&T commercials. Even as I type this, tears are streaming down my face in memories of growing pains, hurt and heartache, incredible happiness, laughter and dancing – memories that even at the conclusion of this story still come together in an experience bigger than me, unspeakable, and even unknowable. A friend’s mom told him once: “You’ve been dealt a different hand. Make sure you play it well.” Seeing that quilt panel made me believe that perhaps I have indeed played my hand well. Hopefully I will continue to do so. Is there more to ask from life?

## WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM MY FRIENDS

By Mairead Sullivan ('03)

At 8:45 on the morning of September 11, 2001, I was racing down the Dinand stairs to get to my 9:00 AM Intro to Women's Studies class. The night before a student had committed suicide in the dorms and the campus was now abuzz with the news of a fluke accident involving a plane that had crashed into one of the World Trade Towers. As I took my seat, the professor announced that we would be watching the movie *But I'm Cheerleader* as a kick off of our segment on lesbian feminism. Over the course of the next 75 minutes, as the nation's greatest tragedy unfolded unbeknownst to us, I sat through the satirical portrayal of a gay conversion camp. I had seen the movie years earlier, but on the heels of a summer spent struggling with my disclosure to a single friend, my perspective had changed sharply.

By the time I exited class, four planes had crashed between New York, Washington, DC, and Pennsylvania. I raced to a friend's house on Caro Street just in time to watch the second tower implode. It was hours before I was able to establish a phone connection with my sister in DC or my father who was traveling that day. Soon, the stories started pouring in of family and friends lost across the campus community. Our history was forever changed.

Earlier that summer, my friends and I had commemorated the school year by renting a house on Cape Cod, in the Cape Week tradition. On the final night of that trip, in a tequila driven haze, I tearfully confessed to a friend that yes, indeed, I was interested in kissing girls. I begged her not to tell anyone and she held that secret the entire summer, becoming the sole outlet for my struggle in this new revelation. I returned to school that year not sure who else I would tell, or when. But, on September 11<sup>th</sup>, I knew that I could no longer hide in the closet I had created.

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I grew up somewhat of a tomboy and struggled with my gender identity for much of my earlier life. I initially did not recall being aware of any gay persons in my life for the first 17 years, though hindsight has certainly shown this perception to be a fallacy. I was, however, grossly aware of the concept of homosexuality, mostly through the hate-filled epithets I heard around me. It was only in my most secret (and mostly subconscious) thoughts I allowed for the notion that this could be me to surface.

The summer before my senior year of high school, my parents announced our family would be moving to London, England where my father's job had transferred him. The pending move was devastating, further complicated when I was diagnosed with mono and spent most of the summer in bed. It took only a few brief days, however, to acclimate to my new community overseas. Having grown up in a homogenous suburb of Chicago, attending Catholic school my whole life, my classmates at the American School of London, who drew from across the 50 United States, as well as Canada, Australia, and the United Arab Emirates offered access to experiences and lifestyles I had never even imagined.

London was my first true exposure to gay people. Many of the teachers at my school were out, most notably my psychology teacher and academic advisor whose partner was the dean

of the high school. It was amongst my new peer group that I began to explore the possibility that I might be gay. Even so, my explorations were couched in “what ifs” and “maybe’s.”

I had visited Holy Cross on a sunny Tuesday the April before I moved to London. Holy Cross was merely a side stop on my trip to visit the big Boston schools but I was immediately struck by the intimacy of the campus. From that day forward, I identified it as my top choice for school. Despite the gross upheaval in my sense of identity and place in the world, I never waived from keeping Holy Cross as my top choice. Men from my father’s family, dating back to the mid-nineteenth century, had been Crusaders and I reveled in the idea of being the first female Sullivan to claim that distinction.

I arrived on the hill in the fall of 1999, in many ways my London year seemed like a distant memory as I returned to the seeming homogeneity as familiar as the community I had left in Chicago. That semester, the religious studies department offered a seminar entitled Catholicism: Theology and Identity, geared toward freshmen. It was the first time I had the opportunity to explore sexuality in the context of my Catholic identity. At the time, I was not yet able to make the leap to explore my own homosexuality; however, the Saturday mornings I spent in Fr. Linane’s office discussing sexual ethics and God’s plans for human sexual expression were the beginning steps to the courageous support I would receive from faculty and staff, Jesuit and non-Jesuit alike, in the coming years.

After an initial struggle with my transition to college, I followed my RAs advice and signed up for the Manresa Retreat through the Chaplain’s Office. Over the next two years, I began to immerse myself in campus culture-I participated in the Appalachia Service Project, joined the Students for Responsible Choices, lead a Manressa Retreat, changed my major from Psychology to Religious Studies, and became a regular fixture at off-campus parties. My intimate network of friends was growing more intimate and my wider social circle even wider. Even so, there seemed to be a piece of me missing. I have vague recollections of hate crimes taking place around campus in those first few years. I knew there was a group called ABiGaLe; though I could recognize the tragedies, I could not yet connect these events with my own identity.

It all came to a head at the end of my sophomore year. I was preparing to return to my family’s home in Chicago and something was shifting inside of me. With my discreet disclosure to a friend on that Cape Cod porch, that something began to unravel. In the airport on my way home, I bought a book, *Tea: A Novel* by Stacy D’Erasmus, based solely on the cover. I wept on the plane as the novel unraveled the story of Isabel Gold experiencing her first lesbian love affair in the wake of her mother’s suicide. The following weeks found me renting every gay themed movie at my local Blockbuster and watching them late into the night in my parents’ basement. I returned to campus that year with a new off campus apartment, a solid group of friends, and a terrifying opportunity. In the days and weeks that followed September 11<sup>th</sup>, I slowly began to share my struggle with those around me, to no one’s surprise. To say that I was supported in coming out is an understatement. The people who supported me from that time remain my best friends today.

When I first cracked that closet door, it flew open with a momentum I hardly expected. Almost immediately, a friend took me to my first gay bar, The Male Box in downtown

Worcester. Soon, I was regularly riding with a group to Sunday nights at Avalon or Thursday nights at Manray in Boston. I no longer took the pains to hide my identity from anyone; yet, inside I was struggling with how to match my true self to this new label.

The first place I found solace for my struggle was in my academics. My burgeoning feminist awakening provided the guiding light in my understanding of queer culture and history. I immersed myself in great lesbian authors and historical figures. Backward and forward, I could recite the timeline and major players from the pre-stonewall Daughters of Bilitis to the Lavendar Menace ushering in the third wave of feminism. To my shock, I discovered that Dinand held subscriptions to magazines such as *Curve*, *Out*, and *Off Our Backs*. I spent countless study breaks in the media room reading up on the latest gay gossip and following Allison Bechdel's *Dykes to Watch Out For*. These outlets were the only connection I had to a queer existence outside the gates of Mount St. James.

Controversy stirred around Holy Cross that fall as The Women's Forum announced plans to bring the Vagina Monologues to campus. I quickly joined the ranks and was appointed campus liaison for the accompanying education campaign. Getting involved with the Women's Forum gave me the first platform for speaking from my newly recognized feminist and queer voice. Not long after, I agreed to attend an Allies meeting with a few friends. I entered that room as a first time participant and left with an appointment to direct the Safe Space Program in the coming year. (The Safe Space Program was initially developed as an educational tool for discussing homosexuality with campus leaders, residence staff, and interested students.)

The first Safe Space Program I conducted was in the basement of Healy Hall. There was a very small turnout and as I looked around the room, I realized that over fifty percent of the crowd was comprised of my friends and roommates. The other half of the crowd was the requisite RAs and campus leaders who lived in the dorm. I wasn't preaching to the choir, they were singing for me. I went through the brief presentation; laying out common language for discussing gay people, I defined homosexuality, both scientifically and socially, and carefully made the distinction between transgender and transsexual. I highlighted the needs for tolerance and open discussion in creating a truly safe campus. After fielding a few questions, I directed the audience to a table with literature and small rainbow ribbons which they could pin to their backpacks. A few days later I joined my roommates at the Crossroads Pub. As I looked at our book bags lined up under the table, there was a noticeable gap; mine was the only bag not sporting a small rainbow pride flag. I felt at once exhaled and ashamed.

Every fall at Holy Cross, Allies and ABiGaLe produce Rainbow Alliance Week, in celebration of gay culture and as a source of pride for gay students on campus. In response, a few RAs often decide to theme their bulletins boards in solidarity with Rainbow Alliance Week. That fall, a bulletin board in Clark dorm, outlining the history of the gay rights movement, was defaced by the residents. As the director of the Safe Space Program, I was asked to meet with the resident staff to discuss a response. The students who had committed the vandal felt their living space had been violated by the display; yet, all agreed that such behavior could not be tolerated. We decided to call dorm meeting to discuss the incident and we would use the Safe Space Program as a launching board.

Well over half of the residence hall turned out for the meeting. In planning for the forum, I was drawn to the feminist ideal of consciousness raising. The meeting was conducted by me and the co-chair of Allies. We laid out a common language and then decided to break the room up into groups to discuss people's reactions to the incident. A moderator was placed in every group, simply to help conversation move, but everyone was allowed and encouraged to speak freely. Students who had been offended by the display were given opportunity to voice their own discomforts while students who objected to the vandalism were able to share their personal stories of gay family members and calls to love and solidarity. I can honestly say, I have never been more proud to be a part of a single experience and I give all credit to the students who entered that space. Every person in the room left with a new understanding and a feeling of being heard. To this day, that singular experience continues to inform and influence my own interactions with difference and propels me to work from a vision of shared consciousness.

In the weeks and months following the success of this Safe Space format, I worked to revise the program and was invited to bring it to many venues across campus. I found my self speaking to a Women's Studies class on my experiences growing up gay and coming out, I presented the Safe Space Program to residence life staff and administrators, I was called on to offer guidance on the incorporation of queer theory into the Women and Gender Studies curriculum. Without a doubt, I felt wanted, useful and loved because of the ways in which I was embraced through my department, the administration, and amongst my peers. And yet, I could not help but feel like a poser, I cheater of sorts. Here I was speaking to an identity and a lifestyle with which I hardly felt I had experienced.

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It was not until two years after graduating from Holy Cross that I truly began to come out, or come into my own, as it were. I remained the token gay in my largely straight social circles, embarrassed and uncertain how to break into queer spaces or community. As I write this, it has been nearly 6 years since I walked across the stage on Freshman Field. I have developed a queer identity that is at once radically different from the persona I embodied as an undergrad student but is also a product of the struggles and victories I confronted as a gay student. The two years that I was out at Holy Cross were far and away the most formative years I have known. In that time, I was challenged to the very core of my identity and my personhood. Even so, I was fueled by the excitement and liberation of embracing queer culture.

On paper, my Holy Cross experience is summed up in leadership experiences and academic pursuits. In reality, these were the outlets I needed to survive the day to day occurrences of being queer on our small, Catholic campus. My memories are peppered with these lived experiences: the vigils we held when a student was forced to move residences because the unrelenting, homophobic torment and harassment; my Intro to Women's Studies professor who suggested I invest in a tuxedo, an idea that seemed absurd at the time but is coming to fruition as I prepare to stand beside one of my best friends, and HC alum, at her wedding; the incredible participants in the Chaplain's Office coming out support group; the late nights spent planning drag shows and writing editorials in the ABiGaLe Office; the professor who harassed and scolded me for speaking from a "gay agenda"; the utter lack of any dating scene.

Perhaps one of my most salient memories took place during my senior year. A fellow student, and future Jesuit, and I were invited to debate the ethics of homosexuality and the Catholic Church. I struggled with the concept that I would be debating whether my personhood, not my actions, was morally acceptable. My fellow student had made his distaste for Allies and ABiGaLe well known and, in the end, I decided that countering his view and presenting the conundrum of debating one's personhood would provide a far greater benefit than refusing participation. Much to my surprise, and the shock of the organizers, my "opponent" arrived at the event and asked to speak before the beginning of questions. His words, according to my memory, were roughly this: "I know you have asked me here tonight because you hope that I will engage in a heated, if not entertaining, argument with Mairead. I have not come here to do so. I will offer what I know about the church's teachings on homosexuality but I will not in anyway seek to challenge Mairead's identity or her experience." It was a lesson in humility, in love thy neighbor and thy enemy, that I will never forget.

When I tell people that I am a graduate of a small school called Holy Cross, their look is often one of amazement. In many ways my personal and professional lives seem in contrast to popular conceptualizations of the Catholic Church. And yet, I am proud to relay my story of the love and support I received as a queer student at Holy Cross. People are shocked when I report that the greatest support I received was from the unlikely sources of the Chaplain's Office, my home department of Religious Studies, the Jesuit Community, and the Student Life Staff. My journey was not a solitary one. Beside me every step of the way were brave crusaders of the lavender persuasion-my fellow student leaders, who taught, led, and inspired me; the out and proud who came before me, offering the hope and magic of a queer life; those who bore the hate of our peers with pride and determination; and, of course, the HC alum I see from time to time who have ventured out of the closet since our time on the hill.



## FORMED BY THE CROSS

By Lawrence Manfredi ('03)

When I tell people that I am a moral theologian in the Catholic Church, I'm often met with a wary look and a tentative "OK, what does that mean?" What they really want to know is "how is *that* possible—to be both gay and Catholic?" This question is best answered by examining several periods of my life, centered upon my time at Holy Cross. These periods include my high school years, which I think of now as my "anti-formation," my time at Holy Cross (my "formation"), and the years following in graduate school. What follows is my story, a story necessarily interwoven with the lives of those people I discovered and became friends with during my college years. I am grateful to them (and to my family) for supporting me throughout the many challenges I have faced over the past decade.

### I. "Anti-formation"

My high school education was...well, the education itself was quite solid and I am grateful for the discipline and spirit of academic inquiry that my teachers inculcated in me. On the other hand, the culture of the school is far from what I would consider conducive to authentic mental, spiritual, and social growth. I went to a well regarded all-boys Catholic prep school in Long Island, NY—a school steeped in a conservative strand of Catholicism. I recognize now that my high school was (and almost certainly still is) an institution permeated by homophobia and misogyny. These twin evils run essentially unchecked. Sometimes I think of my high school as an experiment in theocracy gone terribly wrong. There are no clubs or organizations to address issues affecting gay students, or even a group to explicate official church teaching on homosexuality, which would include the need to respect the God-given dignity of all persons, including gays. There is little or no support for the student who may be questioning his sexual orientation or recognizing his identity for what it is. Gay students are virtually invisible there.

My fear of having someone find out I "liked guys" was equivalent to, if not stronger than, my fear of death. The fear of rejection and utter humiliation was ever-present; One of the most popular student slurs is "faggot." Faced with such a hostile environment, and knowing that I was "different" from other students, I reacted in the only way I knew how: I withdrew into myself and became detached from my fellow classmates. I studied and read as much as I could, which was wonderful for my grades, but did nothing to help me grow socially.

Although I graduated in 1999, I doubt the culture has changed much. My high school years were anxiety-ridden. Faced with the paradox of having an attraction to men and existing in an educational culture that branded such an attraction as "intrinsically disordered," I was consoled only by an off-hand comment by one of my teachers—that same-sex attraction is nothing more than a "phase" that will soon pass. Obviously it didn't pass. Against all odds, I became involved with a fellow student around Christmas of my senior year. It was one of the only times I could say that I was actually "happy" during high school, even if our relationship was completely closeted.

The things that helped me through each day were a passion for my studies, school breaks, the prospect of college, and yes, weekly episodes of *Star Trek: Voyager*! College beckoned to me

like a savior, promising a degree of freedom I had never known. More importantly, it meant no more mandatory gym class three times a week!

Despite strongly disliking my high school and much of its particular culture, I inexplicably felt that a Catholic institution was the only truly viable choice for a college education. Perhaps this was partly due to the strong disdain held by students and teachers for “pagans” and “heathen” schools. But I was drawn to Holy Cross for reasons deeper than scorn for non-Catholic institutions, reasons I only later identified. Even in high school, I perceived something so subtle that it was easily missed in the day-to-day grind. I caught glimpses of it only at brief moments during our monthly school-wide Mass. And it disappeared as quickly as it arrived: there was something about Catholicism that was distinctive, life-giving, and magnetic. It created some kind of a bond between myself and my classmates (from whom I was typically distanced), a bond that is hard to define. Love and concern for the other moved to the center of our collective attention. This bond would hold but for a second or two, and then vanish into the noise and activity of the day. Nevertheless, these moments anticipated my future engagement with Catholicism at Holy Cross and beyond.

Sorting through potential colleges in the fall of 1998, I knew that Holy Cross was popular with many graduates from my school, and it quickly became the right choice for me. I maintained no false illusions that collegiate culture would be significantly different from that of my high school. As far as I knew, Holy Cross would simply be a more “grown-up” version of the kind of education and culture to which I was already accustomed—just as much homophobia and the same basic religious and political ideas. Boy, was I wrong! As for the misogyny, I had hoped it might at least be slightly eased by the fact that women would be a part of both the classroom and the campus. There is no doubt that Holy Cross exploded my conception of what a Catholic educational institution could be—and thank God!

## **II. Formation**

I found my voice at Holy Cross. By the time I arrived at HC, the administration had already officially sanctioned three campus groups: Allies, ABiGaLe, and a confidential chaplains’ group that would prove enormously helpful in my coming out process. I was also to discover that most people at HC, in my experience, were tolerant of gay students, if not outright accepting. After languishing for four years in a rigid all-boys school, college was an utterly liberating experience. While there were a few disturbing incidents of homophobia during the years of ’99 to ’03, my journey as an undergraduate was largely unaffected by this. I have no doubt that my success at HC was due in no small part to the work of GLBT and GLBT-friendly students, faculty, and administration.

I want to relate a funny incident—which a number of my friends still like to recount, much to my embarrassment—that demonstrates my political and social naivete upon entering college. I remember heading out to vote in the 2000 presidential election with several of my good college friends. I knew little to nothing about politics. We were discussing who would be a better president (Gore or Bush), and then I raised what suddenly became a serious question for me: “Bill Clinton—is he a Democrat or a Republican? I think he’s Republican, but I’m not sure...” After ten minutes of good-natured laughter, I finally received my answer. The point is that the meaning of the word “liberal” finally began to dawn upon me. Despite having grown up in a “blue state,” I had lived and attended school most of my life in an overwhelmingly “red”

community, not that I knew the difference between these colors when I entered college. I can look back and laugh as I think about the insular “bubble” I grew up in. My nascent interest in politics, and especially its intersection with ethics and theology, would continue to grow in the following years.

In the second semester of my first year, troubled by my homosexuality and my struggle with church teaching, I reached out to the smaller private chaplains’ group run by an amazing woman, Marybeth Kearns-Barrett. I sent an email with a *very* hesitant inquiry about the group and she invited me to visit her office. Walking down from Hanselman to meet her, I felt my anxiety level shoot through the roof. I don’t distinctly remember most of what was said, but I do remember admitting that “I might be bi.” It wasn’t exactly the truth, but admitting outright that I was gay to another person (and therefore to myself) was unimaginable. It was the first time I had ever opened up to someone and shared something so intimate and delicate. I was certain I would end up being crushed. I remember either crying or being on the verge of tears. I truly felt my visit with her would and could only end in rejection, as I had already rejected myself.

But then Marybeth did something I will never forget: she hugged me. Although I come from a relatively loving, albeit Republican, family, to be hugged by someone to whom I just confessed that I wasn’t completely straight was simply earth-shattering. Here was someone I didn’t really know—who didn’t really know me—offering me unconditional acceptance. It took me a long time to process fully what had happened in that encounter. Looking back, I can clearly discern God’s concrete love in that moment of acceptance—a love that I had only glimpsed, darkly, for a few fleeting moments in high school. And there it was, directed at me! I still tear up thinking about it. I left her office strangely reassured and yet utterly bewildered at the same time. Someone who represented both the college and the church saw a side of me about which I had always been ashamed, a side that I loathed, and yet she embraced me. It was truly the first of several *kairos* (transformative) moments I would experience while at Holy Cross.

The coming out process that ensued was of course carefully measured and planned, and not something to which I typically looked forward. After all, I had survived high school by keeping mostly to myself. Old survival strategies are hard to outgrow. And so I was never terribly out on campus—I never joined AbiGaLe, and I went to only one or two Allies meetings. One of the main reasons that I chose not to participate actively in this scene was because I quickly grew comfortable in my own “niche” of friends, academics, and activities. I chose to come out only to the people closest to me. I had developed strong friendships with three straight guys in my year – my roommate Doug (an acquaintance/friend from high school), Tom (physicist and Fenwick Scholar ‘03) and Evan (musicologist/classicist and also Fenwick scholar ‘03). Each came from Catholic families and were well educated in the tenants and tradition of the faith. Entering college, each held their faith strongly and were mostly religiously conservative. Church teaching on a host of issues (and sexual morality in particular) maintained a strong grasp on their consciousness. I came out to them at different times, as I was naturally worried how they would handle it and what effect it would have on our friendship.

Come to think of it, I was worried how anyone I told would handle it. This anxiety was fueled by years of internalized homophobia and the struggle to love myself. It was hard to imagine that others could find me loveable when I was still unable to accept myself fully, even

with the radical affirmation I received from Marybeth. I told Doug sometime in the fall of 2000.<sup>1</sup> I informed Tom and Evan a few months afterward. Again, I knew that all three of my good friends were conservative Catholics, and a revelation to them that I was gay could potentially push them away from me. Still, I felt this was something I *needed* my friends to know. Ultimately, I was fortunate enough to have chosen friends for whom this was largely inconsequential to our friendship. They accepted me for who I was. In the meantime, something which I have difficulty naming was going on in each of us that would continue throughout our undergraduate years...

Just as I had entered college closeted and quite naive, and eventually became confident in my own skin, they likewise went through something of a transformation. It may have only been a minor change—holding a little less rigidly to hierarchical teaching; asking questions not just in their classes, but about life in general; becoming slightly more open to new ideas and possibilities—but the effect was significant. My roommate and best friend Doug switched his major to Religious Studies, and I was soon to follow. Enthusiasm for all things Catholic was par for the course with my small group of friends. Religion was something the four of us could all talk about and enjoy, and I was eager to soak up as much as I could. We often attended Sunday Mass together, and even daily Mass at noon, which was edifying, especially as an exercise in asceticism and humility: it meant a half-hour spent in prayer before heading to Kimball for lunch, a half-hour of embarrassing stomach rumblings!

I have never finally determined whether my coming out prompted my friends to reexamine their understanding of church teaching on sexual morality or whether the education provided by Holy Cross and the experiences of undergraduate life enabled them in turn to embrace and accept me. Perhaps the order is unimportant. What is significant is that, for my friends as for myself, our time at Holy Cross was a developmental process. The content of our classes and lectures aside, there is no doubt we were each in a different place at the end of our four years than at the beginning, and for the better.

I want to share one other key moment from my years at HC. I mentioned above that I majored in Religious Studies. Although I entered as a Biology major, I found it unsatisfying insofar as memorization took precedence over thought, at least for a number of the introductory courses. The first semester of my sophomore year, I registered for Contemporary Christian Morality with Fr. Brian Linnane, now president of Loyola College in Maryland. This class was singularly formative. It gave me something that I had unknowingly craved since high school and yet never received: an intellectually satisfying account of homosexuality and same-sex relations as morally permissible if driven by a good motivation. This account served as a point of departure for my own intellectual development as well as my future graduate studies.<sup>2</sup>

Whereas my high school had taught the magisterial perspective that homosexuality frustrates the “purpose” of the sexual organs, thwarts procreation, and is essentially a stunted

<sup>1</sup> I told my mother and father shortly afterwards over the phone. It was the night that I returned from a Manresa retreat and was feeling both affirmed and loved from the experience. While coming out to my parents was difficult for them at first, they loved me no less for it. I am truly blessed for their enduring love and support.

<sup>2</sup> The ethical system to which Fr. Linnane introduced me is known as Personalism, as pioneered by Belgian theologian Louis Janssens in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Personalism hinges upon the following criteria: “Actions are morally right insofar as they are beneficial to persons, adequately considered, as unique, embodied spirits, and in their relations to others, God, self, and the wider world.” Essentially, homosexuality and same-sex relations are life-giving realities to the degree that they promote human flourishing.

form of sexuality, I was learning at Holy Cross (from a priest nonetheless!) that particular actions (or relationships) had to be considered in light of their total impact upon us and others. They ought to contribute to holistic human growth. This lesson finally gave me a theological and ethical framework for understanding homosexuality and same-sex relationships. The latter could no longer be automatically dismissed as “immoral.” Homosexuality is *not* a cross to be borne. It is not a heavy burden to be carried throughout one’s life. It is simply another way of being human.

### **III. Beyond the Cross**

Armored with a renewed intellectual and theological appraisal of the potential value of homosexuality, I graduated HC and began my M.A. in Theology at our one-time Jesuit rival down the road, Boston College. I continued my studies by working with a Jesuit who was soon to become my advisor, professor, and friend: James Keenan.

Boston College was both a step forward and a step backward vis-à-vis HC. It was a step forward for me in that I was continuing my theological and ethical education with some of the brightest and best-known ethicists in the field of morals. However, the move to Boston College was a step backward in a cultural/institutional sense. In 2003, BC had no officially sanctioned equivalent of ABiGaLe (thus there was no space on campus dedicated solely to discussing issues of sexual orientation), and nothing like the chaplains’ support group that had so nourished me in my first and second years at Holy Cross. Furthermore, BC has only recently formally recognized Allies on campus.

I remember attending a lecture at Boston College given by gay author and cultural commentator, Andrew Sullivan, in the spring of ’03, while I was still a Holy Cross senior. Interestingly, Sullivan is also a conservative. For Sullivan, both faith and sexuality are givens, and neither can be denied. Had he spoken at HC, there would likely have been a small minority who would have taken offense at his ideas, or even just his presence. They might have registered their discontent with a strident question or two. At BC, however, something approximating a third of the audience disagreed with his particular position in support of gay marriage. Many of those who disagreed had graduated more than a decade ago.

I specifically remember an old woman leaving the crowd early and giving a “thumbs-up” to one speaker who discredited Sullivan’s notion that sex is important for a functional and loving gay relationship. That woman is symbolic of one of the primary forces of resistance which gay and lesbian students encounter on campuses like Holy Cross and Boston College: alumni (older alumni to be precise). Many of these alumni graduated from BC and HC before they were coeducational. While there are a number of similarities between the Cross and BC, BC has the added complication of a highly vocal (and larger) pool of financially wealthy alumni who skew conservative. In contrast, the student bodies at both HC and BC skew progressive.

While BC has faced and likely will continue to face battles over what it means to be Catholic and what it means to be a university, as a graduate student I feel somewhat removed from these issues. Dedicating myself to graduate theological and ethical studies, and having experienced extraordinary acceptance and approval at HC, I have moved into moral waters deeper than those that occupied me during my HC years. The Catholic tradition is rich and varied, and cannot be taken hostage by labels such as “conservative” or “progressive.” My style in dealing with moral controversy is strongly tilted toward discourse and conversation. I’ve never

been the activist type, despite feeling very strongly about certain issues. If I focus on my studies, teach, and publish my writings based upon an intellectually credible grasp of theology, ethics, and truth, then hopefully that will impact students, fellow colleagues, and even the wider church, while leaving structural change to others with more vested interests (for example, the undergraduates who will be receiving their degree from the university they will call their *alma mater*). I firmly believe that the truth that may now be hidden shall not remain unrevealed.

In short, I owe Holy Cross more than I could ever repay. It enabled me to recognize the misogyny and homophobia which I breathed every day in high school and to cast these things out of myself. It provided me with the opportunity to find my own voice and to accept my own identity. It inspired a love for theology and ethics. Finally, it gave me the willpower and determination not to despair when I entered BC, an institution still grappling with its *own* identity, by giving me the tools to continue my education and move forward in my life. I came out to the people I knew and cared about. My hope is that each gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender student who makes that journey—from the first drive up Linden Lane to commencement on Fitton Field, is able to call Holy Cross “home.” For it was, and always will be, home to me.

# NAVIGATING MY QUEERNESS: THE JOURNEY OF A BLACK MAN

## TRYING TO FIND HIS TRUTH

By Chris Campbell ('15)

Growing up in a Christ-centered yet violently homophobic country traumatized me, for coming out and naming my feelings could have led to me losing my life. People in Jamaica are humiliated, tortured, burnt, and killed for being or acting “gay.” It was no surprise that *Time Magazine* named Jamaica “the most homophobic place on Earth” in 2006. Homophobia and transphobia are both amplified by the dominance of Christian doctrines and beliefs. These beliefs and doctrines have justified the excruciating levels of violence towards queer and trans people. I always knew growing up that I was different, but due to the social issues that predicated my life such as poverty and parental conflict, I suppressed feelings that would have forced me to engage with my sexuality. From an early age, I was tortured by my peers and well-meaning family members because of the effeminate traits I possessed. I was called names such as sissy, faggot, battyman (Jamaican term for gays), and mocked for being, acting, and sounding “girly.”

My childhood experiences caused me to hate my life because I was “different” in the eyes of people who would consider themselves “straight,” people struggling with their own internalized homophobia, or well-meaning family members who had a strong desire for me to lose my feminine traits. Unfortunately, my dad was also a perpetrator, which meant there was no escape from the torture and teasing. At home, I wasn’t manly enough and outside my home I was constantly told I was going to burn in hell. People would throw rocks, water, or anything they could find when I was walking down the street or just sitting in class. They did everything to make my life miserable. Although I became numb and accustomed to the constant harassment and torture, I made a conscious effort to be “masculine” or “act like a man” in order to not get teased, robbed, or killed. I lived in fear, fear of losing my family or death.

I can recall two occasions in high school when students were escorted from the campus because they were mobbed by a group of students with broken glass, iron, and other things to kill them. Sadly, this experience of seeing people being attacked for living honestly amplified the fact that people like me are seen as sinners. Violence against us is considered justifiable according to the bible and the toxic culture of homophobia. I hated my life; I just wanted not to be gay. I suppressed my feelings and emotions by subscribing to toxic and heteronormative masculinity. I deepened my voice, dated girls, and acted “straight.” I tried to *be* “straight,” but I always felt like I was failing miserably. I would often hide my queerness by speaking harshly about gays or anyone who was apparently gay. I would say horrible things about my own friends, pretending that I didn’t even know them when they approached so I could protect myself from being mistreated or harassed.

I later came to realize that my actions were rooted in internalized homophobia. Despite my self-denial and self-hatred, I still found myself falling deeply for guys. Whenever that would

happen, I would censure myself because I believed that I was going to hell. I was ashamed and mad at myself whenever I had homosexual thoughts and erotic feelings.

The church taught me that being gay was a sin and constantly reiterated the fact that homosexuality is condemned. Growing up in the Caribbean meant attending church services where the pastor inevitably made a direct and hostile comment about gay people. Gays are constantly chastised in sermons as perverted and immoral beings. One would hear Leviticus 20:13 repeatedly referred to and recited in depth for the congregation to understand. I would sit in church confused because I was aware of the fact that Christians were being hypocritical by picking and choosing which verses of the Bible they should uphold. I would often ask myself, why is it that the same Christians who disregard dietary rules enforce scriptures that speak against homosexuality?

Leaving Jamaica to attend the College of the Holy Cross was the best thing that could have happened in my life. Coming to the United States opened my eyes to tolerance and even acceptance, and to the fact that gay people exist. It was beautiful and inspiring to see two men walking down the street holding hands or people openly expressing their queerness. My first semester in college was a dilemma because I remember meeting a guy who was gay, who I was secretly in love with. Sadly, due to my socialization in Jamaica, I reminded myself that I couldn't have those feelings. This guy would try to pull me out of the closet, but I would shun him, saying I am not gay. After going home for winter break during my first semester, all I could think about was this guy. Our conversations via Facebook were not enough. I missed him and I couldn't wait to see him when I returned. Despite these feelings, I would mentally remind myself that I was not gay. "Maybe I am bisexual? I can't be gay because being gay is immoral and sinful. Maybe this is just a temporary feeling? I will get over it. This is just a phase," as people would say.

What I was experiencing was not just a phase because I continued to struggle with my sexuality throughout my four years at Holy Cross. I chose not to come out because I feared being referred to as "the Black kid who was gay." I was already being tokenized for being Black and international, and I didn't want to add gay to the mix. I was also rejected and marginalized by the gay community on campus, which I felt was due to blatant racism and the "down-low" culture in the gay community which refers to men who identify as straight, but secretly have sexual relationships with men. Most times, engaging with white gay men was rooted in the fetishization of the Black male's body, which made me uncomfortable. The dualism of being Black and gay negatively affected my psychological well-being and self-esteem, which often led to me feeling depressed. The issue of coming out was compounded by the fact that I didn't see many Black people who were openly gay on campus. Yes, we existed, but we were not out. The LGBTQ+ student organization was predominantly white as most gay Black men during my time at Holy Cross preferred to be on the "down-low." Consequently, most of the students who were out were usually white. As a Black man, I felt like I did not belong or fit in within the gay community, and the gay culture made me feel like I could not be who I am.

Studying abroad in Paris aided my coming out process. It was nice not being at Holy Cross where I felt I was being pressured to come out. I was able to develop my own story and



truth in a foreign place. When I returned from Paris, I came out to my college roommate of three years. The beautiful thing is that we both came out to each other that early Saturday morning. He was out of the closet his Senior year, but I was only out to him and a couple staff members in Student Affairs. I preferred to be selective because while I had begun to accept some of the aspects of my sexuality, I still struggled with some of the same issues I mentioned before. It took leaving Holy Cross and attending graduate school to finally feel like I could publicly live my truth. Being at an institution that created spaces for queer and trans people of color was just what I needed. Additionally, the community I cultivated allowed me to own, embrace, and love my queerness.

As someone who was struggling with my sexuality at Holy Cross, I believe that my coming out process could have been aided if the College had developed specific outreach programs and activities for queer and trans students of color. The dialogues about LGBTQ issues often focused on whiteness or were framed around the white gay experience. The College was already not a friendly place for students of color, much less queer and trans students of color. My experience as a queer man of color at Holy Cross was thus painful, but Holy Cross gave me the tools necessary to begin the journey of finding myself. Holy Cross will forever hold a special place in my heart because I was gifted with amazing friends who have become my chosen family. Being queer at a religious institution can make it hard to exist, but I had many moments such as being loved and affirmed by my roommate where I was reminded that my existence is resistance and power. I have no regrets about my time on the Hill, but below is a letter to the closeted Chris in college:

*Dear Chris,*

*Why are you hiding who you are? Why are you dimming your greatness and truth? There is no need to be perfect and conform to heteronormative culture and practices rooted in whiteness. Don't stay quiet and try to fit in: rather, show up as your true self and brave the precariousness and criticism that will come with being who you are. As Oscar Wilde said, "Be yourself. Everyone else is already taken." Find your truth and don't you dare listen to what others think. Free yourself from the expectation that you need to live your life in a linear way that is rooted in heteronormative practices. Do not hold on to your fears and insecurities; instead, allow yourself to adapt to your newly discovered and evolving reality. Make sure you believe in yourself and your dreams and stand up for your own agenda rather than going with the norm or aligning yourself with a particular identity out of fear. Love yourself today, tomorrow, and every day. Take time to be one with yourself. People will love you for who you are, but you need to love yourself first. Lastly, make sure you try to find joy in all that you are and all that you do.*

*Sincerely,*

*Chris*

## THE GIFT OF NAMING: A REFLECTION

By Carlito Espudo ('18)

It is June as I write this, and I am in San Diego on an unusually overcast and chilly day. I have been mulling over this reflection for months now, and have, in a fashion painfully similar to my years at Holy Cross, waited until conceivably the “last minute” to start writing this reflection. (Shocker, I know.) Just a year ago, I was in Worcester, Massachusetts, trying to stay awake through the onslaught of commencement speeches after I had walked the stage and received my diploma. A year passes by so quickly now, doesn't it? Or at least it does as you get older, so I'm told. But yes, a lot changes in a year, and even more changes when you're away at college.

I studied at Holy Cross from 2014-2018. I packed my bags, bought my first winter coat and snow boots, and said good-bye to my hometown of Palm Springs, California to board a plane destined for Boston. I was a queer Chicanx desert rat travelling 3000 miles away from everything and everyone I knew. I never could have expected all that was waiting for me on Mount St. James.

As with any experience or transformation, there are many facets to this story. And their complexity is not very conducive for neat story telling. In my Holy Cross experience, there good times and there were bad times and everything in between the two. There were challenges that made me stronger, and there were joys that later brought me pain. I cannot, in good conscience, focus on one and not the other, and I hope that by speaking to both, my narrative is better—and more complete—because of it.

I should also mention that I don't believe there is an objectively “right or wrong choice” in most life decisions (we're not talking about morality here, folx). Rather, there are the choices we make, and the consequences/outcomes that we live with. And we're all just trying to make the best of them. To that extent, attending Holy Cross was a choice I made, and in my four years, and even now after the fact, I have been trying to make the best of them. But anyway, enough of that. I'm starting to stall because I'm not sure where to start. As with most stories, I suppose I should begin with a name.

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After I had run away to Ireland for a year of study abroad, I found myself in the fall of my senior year at a liturgical ministers' retreat at the newly-built Joyce Contemplative Center. This brief retreat allowed me to address some of the questions and problems I had been avoiding while I was away. I had found it increasingly difficult to resolve my gender identity and queerness with my faith and practice. The world seemed to become worse and worse around me, and the strain put on this point of intersection eventually broke it. And so, when I left Holy Cross for Trinity College, I decided to leave in more ways than just the physical sense. I stopped going to church. I stopped praying. I stopped talking to God all together and stopped trying to listen for Xer guidance. I let my heart go silent.

But upon returning to Holy Cross and the community that eagerly waited for me, my heart broke through the silence. What did I want my relationship with God to look like, if any at all? How would this affect my role in Liturgical Ministry and Campion House—two places I could not imagine my life without? What did I still want to do with my last year on the hill? But loudest among these questions was this: *Who was I trying to be?*

In between retreat sessions, I was journaling in the seats right next to the kitchen, the ones that overlook the small courtyard. The day looked charged with energy: the tall grass, the wildflowers, the shocking blue of the sky. It was all so beautiful, and here I was wrestling with questions and pain and hope all at once.

In exasperation, I asked God a question that had been frequent in my life up to this point: *Why?* Why did I have to worry about any of this at all? Why did you make me this way, why was I given these crosses and what was I supposed to do with them? And the one that still creeps into my mind, even now: Why couldn't you let me be “normal?”

And of course, there are no easy answers, and at least in my experience, there are rarely direct answers when I listen for God's voice. And then a moment later, I heard it in my heart: not an answer, not even a sentence or another question, just one word:

### *Carlito*

A name I had held in secret, in the safety between pages of my journal. A name I had still not been ready to claim, to embody. In this, God gave me a gift, not of a name, but of *naming*. It felt like this had been Xer name for me all along, and I was finally able to hear it. When confronted again with that loud question “Who am I trying to be?”, the answer was simple: I was trying to be Lito in whatever way that meant.

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Before I was Lito, I was Catarina. Someone different, but still a part of me. When I arrived as a first-year, I was just trying to keep my head above water. As a first gen student, I had a whole family of people counting on me, rooting for me back home. I couldn't let them down. The interests I pursued then are pretty much the same ones I pursue and work in now, and they can be summed up as “if it's literature or gay, I'm in.” Of course, that meant clubs like HC Pride and the Creative Writer's Club, but to my surprise, it also came to include the LGBTQ+ Support Group in Campion House.

I remember receiving the school-wide email while I was getting lunch at Kimball. And before I could talk myself out of it, I emailed Meg Fox-Kelly for a meeting. When the day came to meet Meg, I was a MESS. I even considered just...not showing up. I kept shouting in my head “WHAT IF I'M NOT GAY ENOUGH!?” which is like an ant worrying that it's not small enough. But I digress.

The LGBTQ+ Support Group, and Campion House in general, were the best parts of my time at Holy Cross. And despite everything else that happened during my undergrad, the time I spent in Campion made everything, *everything* worth it. From cookie #1, it was a place that welcomed and respected me unconditionally. I never had to apologize or be ashamed of any part of me. When I think of genuine, active allyship, I think about Campion House and how much all the chaplains did to aid and promote the LGBTQ+ community on campus. From dinners to Rainbow Mixers to funding students to attend IgnationQ, the Chaplain's Office did so much to make me feel that we had a space on campus where we were wanted, safe, and above all else, loved. I'm infinitely grateful to Marybeth Kearns-Barrett, Megan Fox-Kelly, Emily Rauer Davis, Jan Berry, and Andrea Grant for their roles in cultivating that community. This whole reflection could be a love letter to Campion House and the chaplains, and actually, in some ways it is. The fact that I can look back fondly on my time in undergrad is hugely because of them. I would have been so lost without Campion.

The support group grew substantially during my time there, at one point having over twenty members! Holy Cross is so small, so you ran into a lot of the same people, and it was nice seeing those faces and knowing that there was still a queer community like that around you, even if the heteronormativity of school felt suffocating most of the time. We were a generally jovial group, even during the rough times like roommate problems or microaggressions or impossible midterms. I always left group feeling better just for having been there. There was always someone there to uplift you or make you laugh.

And then there came the awful night during my sophomore year when our group lost someone. It was a Friday night, and I had been working the night shift in Campion. There had been worried texts flying in and out of my phone towards the later part of the night about a student on campus that no one had heard from. At this point, I was closing Campion an hour early so I could go be with my friends instead of being scared alone. As I was finishing up, one of the chaplains arrived, but wasn't allowed to answer any of my questions. Shortly after, Meg arrived, and when I saw her face—I knew. The student, one of the members of our group, had been found dead.

People from the support group slowly started to trickle into our meeting place. There was crying and tea and quiet. There was anger and disbelief and consoling. There were too many unanswered questions. There still are. But there was also us, and we had each other. The chaplains pulled together a service for that very night, and people from all parts of school crowded into the arched doors of Saint Joseph's Chapel. The chapel was the most packed I had ever seen it. Our group sat together, squished hip to hip in a pew near the front. We took care of one another in the days that followed, checked in, listened, kept each other company. I can't imagine what that time would have been like without our community, without the love and support we found in each other.

There is often the narrative that queer people live in fear for their own safety, and yes, of course that is true. But, what it leaves out is the bigger fear: the safety of our friends, our chosen family. Speaking for myself, that is where I feel most powerless. Too many of my queer family

have died or been hurt by the world around them. I'm tired of hearing their names on the transgender day of remembrance, I'm tired of worrying after I don't get a "home safe" text, I'm tired of my friends being always in some sort of danger and knowing that I cannot always be there, be an extra number, provide some safety. And these are real fears I had at Holy Cross, even in our little bubble of Worcester.

As much as I appreciate my alma mater, I cannot say I fully trust the institution to protect marginalized students. When I studied abroad in Ireland, I was running away from some personal problems with family and gender and Catholicism. But, I was also putting distance between myself and an institution that failed me. At the end of my sophomore year, I went through months of a painful Title IX investigation related to transphobia I was experiencing on campus, and in the end, I lost. I remember with sharp clarity opening that email and feeling my soul crack. More than anger, I felt betrayed that a school I had put so much of myself into would dismiss me and my experiences in that way. Regardless of the letter's diplomatic language, all I could hear was "You don't matter. Your pain does not matter here." And even though that was years ago, it's almost all I can think about when I'm asked to participate as an alumnus.

When I was first invited to participate in this collection of essays, I was scared to revisit these pains. Part of me is still scared that people will not understand how I can claim to appreciate and love Holy Cross while still sharing these very unpleasant things and being critical. But love is complicated. Faith is complicated. Neither can exist without times of doubt or conflict that one must overcome. This is a conflict I'm still navigating, but I am working towards healing. And as much as I want Holy Cross to magically fix all its problems, I know that responsibility also falls on alumni. One day when I am ready, I will take on that responsibility. I feel an obligation to help make change so future students will not have to go through the same trials or carry the same burdens. That is something I learned from my peers while we were still students.

Any Jesuit school student will recognize the cornerstone of men and women (*ahem, and others*) for others. And part of where I saw this most was in my peers in leadership positions in the various Multicultural Student Organizations (MSOs) like the Caribbean African Student Assembly (CASA), Black Student Union (BSU), Latin American Student Organization (LASO) and PRIDE. I look back at all the work it took for students to be leaders in all these different clubs—and it was like having a full-time job on top of actual jobs and all of *that* on top of being a student at an extremely rigorous school. I am a graduate student now, and I somehow still have more free time than I did as an undergraduate. That's wild! And so of course, that begs that simple question: *Why?* Why subject ourselves to the extra stress and uphill battles?

For a lot of us, it was trying to claim space in the institution, to say firmly that we are a part of Holy Cross, and we deserve to be seen and heard. That didn't start with us. We are a part of a legacy of students who came before us, who stood up and demanded change and made strides to close the ever-widening gap. Each new class of students has the chance to be a part of this legacy that is bigger and beyond them, and that is one of the key things that still gives me hope for Holy Cross.

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Now, this is not to say that there were no moments of progress while I was a student. In fact, one of the opportunities that I explored at Holy Cross helped me work through some of my early gender questioning (and better yet, even paid me). At the beginning of my sophomore year, I had been fortunate enough to find two on-campus jobs outside of the dish room in Kimball Dining Hall (the smell of which still haunts me). One was, of course, in Campion House, and the other was in a new addition to Holy Cross: the Digital Transgender Archive (DTA), founded by Associate Professor of English K.J. Rawson.

If you had told high school Lito that they were going to work in an archive in college and later use it as a core part of their creative writing praxis, they would have looked up from their phone and asked “What’s an *archive*?” And yet, when I received that email from PRIDE about a new super queer archive that needed workers, I paused and wondered if I was even remotely qualified for that. That thought was followed by an image of the Kimball dish room, and I *immediately* sent Professor Rawson an email stating my interest in the DTA.

And that’s how I found myself learning first-hand about transgender history through magazines, photographs, flyers, buttons--you name it, we probably processed and posted it. It was remarkable to be a part of something like that. They recently surpassed 8,000 items, and I can hardly wrap my head around that. I got to be there when we were celebrating *100* objects! Beyond the work, the DTA Lab in Fenwick became a place of community. Some of my best memories of Holy Cross happened in our little lab: decorating for holidays, doing an astrology birth chart for Lani our stuffed unicorn, writing a play about a murderous cooking show for Midnight Theatre with my friend. I made some of my closest friends through the shared suffering of the website eating and deleting the page we spent the last 20 minutes working on.

Beyond that, being a part of the DTA gave me a space to safely explore not only who I was becoming, but also who I still wanted to become. It was the first place I tried out my new pronouns, and eventually, my new name. It’s where I was able to learn from, and build community with, other trans students. I consider it a blessing that I wound up at just the right place at just the right time. When I graduated, it was hard to say good-bye to this pillar within my identity and life. But that feeling also comes with a sense of excitement for what comes next. So many students have been able to work in that lab and contribute to trans history, and I hope many more will get that same chance after them. It is amazing what you learn about yourself and the world when you open yourself up to experience outside of your own.

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There are aspects of my experience that I have left out, or really, just not mentioned in this reflection. Not because they were any less important in my journey, but because sometimes

the best part about these experiences was that they didn't have to be anything "deeper" beyond what they were. I wasn't out there thinking about dismantling the patriarchy every time I made out with a girl at a PRIDE party, you know? Sometimes you just want to dress in drag with your vibrant friend Adam Coshal and host a drag show with *way* too many dick jokes. And that's just as important as all the time we spend advocating for change and teaching others. It is how we build community, and without community, a revolution wouldn't be worth much anyway.

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Like I told you in the beginning, we must accept that not every story will be perfect. I'm sure there are things I could have done better in this reflection. I bet I'll look back on this years from now and laugh to myself about how bad my writing was. And that's okay. For now, I'm satisfied with the thoughts from this iteration of me. There is still something I would like to reflect on further, though, if you'll indulge me: faith within queerness.

My path with faith has always been intertwined with the other parts of my identity in the world. There's no way around that. I was raised Catholic, but within a Chicana and Italian family, that meant religion was inextricably woven into my cultures. It wasn't solely a matter of faith or belief, but rather, it was tradition, and it was an important part of how we understood ourselves in the world. With that comes a specific obligation. If someone becomes a "bad Catholic," they put their family at a disadvantage, like opening the door for bad things to happen. It's hard to explain without oversimplifying it and sounding silly, really, but I understand where this thinking comes from.

I was the only one of my siblings able to attend the new Jesuit high school that had opened in my valley just a couple years before my first year. Again, there was an element of me being in the right place at the right time to the extent that attending this school made the most sense for me. My mother worked herself ragged and made countless sacrifices to make sure we received good, Catholic educations—the kind of sacrifices that I'm not sure I would have the strength to make, really. Once, when we were little, I asked her why, and she explained that she wanted to make sure that we grew up closely with our religion so that it would feel like a home that we could always be comfortable coming back to. Mothers have a superhuman ability to think of everything.

When the time came to apply to colleges, I had zero idea what I wanted or needed from a school. After a period of discernment with God, I decided that I wanted to continue my Jesuit education, which is how a queer brown kid from Southern California heard about College of the Holy Cross in "Worcestershire," Massachusetts in the first place. Better yet, I apparently had family nearby in Plymouth, which made my mother less hesitant about letting me live on the opposite side of the country.

Holy Cross helped sustain my growing desire for stronger community within a church. It helped me realize that faith and belief are two separate yet linked entities. Belief is the set of ideas and guidelines we choose to adhere to, but faith, at least to me, describes our relationship

with God, our personal beliefs, and our church community while on our spiritual journeys. There are some beliefs we share with others, and then there are quite a few that we don't, and many people see that as a bad thing. I personally think it's unavoidable. Nuance will always exist in the minutiae of our lives and experiences, and because no one's experiences of the world can be the same, neither can anyone's faith.

When I was younger, I tried to keep my queerness and my faith separate. It was always a matter of "I'm Catholic, *but* I'm queer," as if one would negate the other. This was not just an internal sentiment. People around me were confused about how I could be both.

"How can you be a part of a religion that's against so many parts of you?"

It's a fair question, and one I continue to wrestle with. There are no easy answers. At some points of my life, I have had to take a step back and take a break from the Church to discern if I want to keep on this path. This year after graduation has been one of those times as I adjust to a new life and figure out how I want God to be present in it. There is one thing I know for certain about my faith: it has been, and always will be, one about love. I think these words from François Mauriac explains that best: "We are all molded & remolded by those who have loved us, and though that love may pass, we remain, none the less, their work. No love, no friendship can ever cross the path of our destiny without leaving some mark upon it forever."

My spiritual journey might not continue to be in an organized religion. To be frank with you, the idea of ever fully turning away from Catholicism terrifies me. Despite its flaws and shortcomings as a social institution, it has also been an anchor in my life that kept me grounded in a way few other things have. Just as my mother had hoped, it feels like a home—a complicated home—to which I often return. The way I see it, even if I were to walk away, it would remain a pillar of who I was and therefore who I am still becoming. Sure, no one *knows* if a god exists, but I hope so! Regardless of labels or loyalties or creed, I choose to believe that we are all a part of something bigger, because if we're not—then what's the point of any of this?

The journals I kept during my time at Holy Cross, and specifically the pages I wrote while on the Spiritual Exercises at three different points during, illustrate an arc of my personal and spiritual growth. They start with an overwhelmed young woman who was struggling to find community in a foreign place: "*I want more than anything to belong somewhere, to some group of people.*" Then, a year later, comes the headstrong baby trans who was aggressively trying their best to heal after a painful sophomore year: "*I have come to the decision that **I matter!** And I guess part of that decision brings about a desire to fully participate in the world.*"



And then, in my last Spiritual Exercises during my senior year, we end with this:

*“My name is Carlito. I am 21, soon to be 22, and I am a boy. One day, I will be a man, but I admit that I don’t know exactly what that means, yet. I can say that, to the best of my knowledge, I am happy. But happiness, of course, is an ongoing process. I am unapologetically queer, and I am working towards being unapologetically trans. It is hard to imagine a time when things were not this way, and that feels good—like I have shed an entire skin and lifetime, instead of being left with scar tissue.*

*The morning before departing on the exercises, I received a burn from a cookie sheet in Campion House. The burn started to peel, and Meg gave me 3 band-aids, 2 of which went on the burn, and the last of which went on the cover of this notebook along with my new name. These represent the two graces I received on this retreat: that of being named, and that of being healed.”*

## AN INTERPRETATION

By James B. Nickoloff  
Associate Professor Emeritus of Religious Studies  
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The contributions to this volume by twelve people who graduated from the College of the Holy Cross between 1978 and 2018 tell compelling human stories. No reader can miss the pain *and* the joy, the struggles *and* the celebrations, the defeats *and* the triumphs of these gifted narrators. But these stories may raise more questions than they answer for many people of Catholic faith--complicated and even delicate questions. For example, what specifically do the accounts presented here challenge in the Catholic Church's official teaching about persons whose affectivity is not exclusively heterosexual? Or, what do these stories tell us about Holy Cross's response over four decades to students who do not belong to the heterosexual majority? And above all, where is God to be found in these narratives? These are all questions people of faith frequently ask. The first is intellectual and invites us to rigorous analysis. The second is ethical, calling us to a forthright evaluation of our behavior. And the third is spiritual, challenging us to an honest examination of our hearts, for that, above all, is where God will be found. Allow me briefly to reflect on—certainly not answer—each of these thorny questions.

A preliminary note: the details of my own life story are not relevant here, but the several vantage points from which I ponder these questions are germane. First, I write as someone who was an instructor in the Department of Religious Studies at Holy Cross for twenty years, from 1989 to 2009. Six of this volume's authors took courses with me

involving fundamental theology, Christian spirituality, ecclesiology, and/or liberation theology. Second, in addition to being a teacher, I am a professional Catholic theologian and thus formed in the community of Catholic faith and practice. Without faith and membership in the Catholic Church (even if in the mode of dissent), it is not possible to “do” Catholic theology. Third, I am a married gay man; with pride and joy I married my partner of many years, Robert McCleary, in 2007 (a marriage then sanctioned by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and recognized since 2015 throughout the United States). Finally, I am now professor emeritus at Holy Cross, which in my case means that although I no longer work at the College, I continue to care deeply about Holy Cross and the kind of education that it promotes. From these vantage points, then, I offer my reflections on the three questions I raised above.

A second preliminary note: I do not assume that my interpretation of the preceding chapters will be accepted by any of the twelve authors. Some may not care at all whether their experience and testimony have any effect on the Catholic Church, its theology, or its view of sexuality. At the same time, it is possible that even a Muslim (like Rusmir Musić) might take satisfaction in seeing his life as a stimulus for Catholic Christians to grow in their faith and understanding. I do not know. In offering this interpretation, I speak only for myself, not for any of these Holy Cross alums, or for anyone else. One thing I do know: these alums care deeply about the present and future of their alma mater. That is why they have shared their stories here.

## The Intellectual Challenge

To begin with the first question above: Which specific elements of the Catholic Church's official teaching about homosexual, bisexual, or transgender persons and relationships are called into question by the real lives presented here?

Many assume they know what the Catholic Church officially teaches about sexual identity and sexual relationships. My experience leads me to conclude, however, that many people, including Catholics, remain unaware of what the Church officially holds and, equally important, what it does *not* hold. An adequate summary of the teaching would include the following four points; omission of any one of the four (a common occurrence) results in misunderstanding. To comprehend the full teaching is a bit like juggling four pins in the air at once: there is no way around the intricacy of this trick if we wish to pull it off. Let me summarize the points here in schematic form.<sup>1</sup>

1. All human persons (of whatever sexual orientation or none) possess an intrinsic dignity and absolute worth due to their origin (namely, God) and their intended destiny (also God).<sup>2</sup> This means that nothing, including sinful behavior, can take away the infinite value of *every* human being.

2. Sexual orientation, which refers to heterosexual, bisexual, or homosexual desire (or its lack in asexual persons), is not chosen (as some Christians believe) but is, according to

<sup>1</sup> Since the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) the Church's magisterium, or official teaching authority (in practice this refers to the bishops of the Church), has issued numerous declarations on the subject of sexuality, gender, and sexual relationships. In the following footnotes I will cite several of the principal declarations. These are all available on-line.

<sup>2</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons" (1986), par. 10. Hereafter this document will be cited as "CDF Letter 1986."

Catholic teaching, the result of complex factors beyond our present ability to understand fully.<sup>3</sup>

3. Any orientation (attraction or desire) other than heterosexual is an unfortunate condition which affects some individuals.<sup>4</sup> Though not chosen by the individual, such attraction must be resisted in order for the individual to achieve personal fulfillment and right relationship with other persons and with God.<sup>5</sup> The Church's magisterium gives two reasons for viewing homosexuality (and by extension all non-heterosexual orientations) as an "intrinsic disorder."

a. First, the magisterium asserts that males and females differ profoundly from each other biologically, psychologically, and even spiritually, and male and female are complementary opposites that will remain so for eternity.<sup>6</sup> Thus when a homosexual person, for example, acts upon his/her natural desire to form a relationship with a person of the same sex, s/he does not—and cannot--experience the deep-seated "otherness" of a person of the opposite sex.<sup>7</sup> According to the magisterium, homosexual relationships lack true interpersonal complementarity and thus are narcissistic. At the same time, because God's love is, according to Catholic tradition, always mediated through created realities and especially through human relationships, a homosexual relationship, as a form of narcissism, does not allow for the two persons to transcend themselves and thus encounter God. Transcendence of self—the only avenue to another person and to God—

<sup>3</sup> CDF Letter 1986, pars. 2, 3, 11.

<sup>4</sup> CDF Letter 1986, par. 3.

<sup>5</sup> CDF Letter 1986, par. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World" (2004), par. 8. Hereafter, CDF Letter 2004.

<sup>7</sup> CDF Letter 1986, par. 7.

requires openness to what is “other,” not what is “same.” This is the magisterium’s chief objection to homosexual relationships because relationship with God hangs in the balance.<sup>8</sup> Based on real-life experience, the authors here who have spouses or life-partners would probably challenge the claims that their relationships necessarily lack complementarity and that self-transcendence cannot occur in the relationship. Very often opposites attract regardless of sexual orientation.

b. A second reason for viewing homosexual orientation as “disordered” and thus unfortunate is the inability of homosexual couples to procreate.<sup>9</sup> According to the Church’s magisterium, any sexual act which is not open to procreation is also closed to God and to the social responsibility that comes with offspring. Thus persons who enter into non-heterosexual relationships, which close them to the possibility of producing children, shirk their responsibility to society. There has been less stress by the magisterium on this second objection to same-sex relationships in recent years, perhaps in response to a growing awareness of the weak logic at work here. For example, should married people who cannot procreate refrain from having sex? Should they even marry?

4. Because homosexual persons are thus “intrinsically disordered” (oriented toward what does not—indeed, cannot--lead to self-transcendence but only to self-indulgence) and homosexual relationships are “sinful” as they damage the individual, society, and the Church, homosexual persons (and by extension all non-heterosexual persons) require

<sup>8</sup> This is very clear in the 2019 declaration of the Vatican’s Congregation for Catholic Education called “‘Male and Female He [sic] Created Them’: Towards a Path of Dialogue on the Question of Gender Theory in Education” (hereafter CCE Declaration 2019), pars. 30, 31, 32, 33, and 35.

<sup>9</sup> CDF Letter 1986, pars. 3, 6, 7.

special care by the Church.<sup>10</sup> Psychological “re-programming” aimed at changing a person’s sexual orientation is not approved by the Catholic Church, as it is by some Christian groups. Instead, the Catholic Church requires its homosexual members to maintain life-long abstinence from all sexual relationships (celibacy) and to seek spiritual union with the suffering of the Crucified Jesus through prayer, a path which will lead the person beyond him/herself to God.<sup>11</sup>

These four elements form the core of the Church’s teaching on homosexuality and provide the foundation for many of the Church’s policies and actions, both internally and in the public sphere, in relation to sexuality. Examples include the magisterium’s opposition to artificial contraception,<sup>12</sup> same-sex marriage,<sup>13</sup> gay clergy,<sup>14</sup> and transgender transition.<sup>15</sup>

Turning now to the real-life stories recounted in this volume, we can ask what light they might shed on the Church’s complex but unified teaching. All of the authors here would welcome the assertion that they (like all others) were born with an intrinsic and absolute dignity and worth, but they would certainly contest the view that their sexuality represents an “intrinsic disorder.” Instead, they affirm—in a variety of ways—that, like all other sexualities, theirs is a mysterious gift from God. And their efforts while at Holy Cross and after graduation to overcome rejection by biological families,

<sup>10</sup> CDF Letter 1986, pars. 3, 12.

<sup>11</sup> CDF Letter 1986, par. 12.

<sup>12</sup> See Pope Paul VI’s 1968 encyclical letter “*Humanae Vitae*: On the Regulation of Birth.”

<sup>13</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions between Homosexual Persons” (2003).

<sup>14</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education, “Instruction Concerning the Criteria for the Discernment of Vocations with regard to Persons with Homosexual Tendencies in View of their Admission to the Seminary and to Holy Orders” (2005).

<sup>15</sup> See CCE Declaration 2019, pars. 8-12, 14, 19-22, and especially 25.

their ecclesial family, and their society have helped them overcome (transcend) selves marked by fear and shame and become persons of trust and pride. In a word, in *their* cases affirming their sexuality has resulted in the very opposite of what the magisterium claims: instead of self-absorption, self-acceptance has led to self-transcendence. Perhaps this is most evident in the range of personal and professional commitments they have made since graduation.

In sum, the lived experiences recounted here both affirm the Church's official teaching (points 1 and 2 of the schema above) and call it into question (points 3 and 4). The points of contradiction, in turn, call for careful empirical analysis, especially using the tools of psychology, sociology, and history. If the Church's claim to be "expert in humanity"<sup>16</sup> is to be credible, its teaching about sexuality and sexual relationships must repudiate misinformation and faulty logic and come to reflect an awareness of the best research available. Could there be a better place to do such investigation than at a Catholic and Jesuit college such as Holy Cross? Isn't this precisely the kind of assistance a Catholic institution of higher learning should offer the Church as it refines its teaching and seeks to strengthen its witness to the love of God in the world?

### The Ethical Challenge

On a second level, the graduates of Holy Cross who speak in this volume remind their alma mater--and the Church it serves--that intellectual life and ethical life,

<sup>16</sup> CDF Letter 2004, par. 1.



while distinct, cannot be separated without doing serious damage to both. What we know and what we do must form a unity.

The stories told in this volume underscore a remarkable record of change at Holy Cross over a period of four decades for both LGBTQ students and for the College as a whole. Some highlights are recounted in the Foreword to this volume. Let me add a word about the evolution of the College's curriculum, specifically in the Department of Religious Studies. I myself was "out" at the College in a very public way from 1997 until I left in 2009 and regularly taught two courses that dealt with LGBTQ experience, spirituality, and theology: "North American Theologies of Liberation" (beginning in 1991) and "The Church and Homosexuality" (beginning in 2000). Both courses were officially approved by the Department of Religious Studies and by the Curriculum Committee of the College; both were often filled to capacity. Students were required to have a clear understanding of the Catholic Church's official teaching on sexuality and sexual relationships. At the same time, we explored scholarly critiques of the Church's teaching which allowed students to reach their own informed conclusions.

Perhaps the most compelling evidence of change at the College can be found in the very words of the contributors to this volume. Richard Carlstrom (HC '78) recounts his misguided efforts to "pass" as heterosexual. Nan O'Connor (HC '84) writes of living in fear and isolation and of escaping into drunkenness to dull the pain. Her classmate Carmine Salvucci speaks of "working hard to be straight in an environment where that seemed to be the only acceptable option." Twenty years later Lawrence Manfredi speaks of finding his voice at Holy Cross and of leaving the College armed with "a renewed intellectual and theological appraisal of the potential value of homosexuality."

Lawrence's 2003 fellow graduate Mairead Sullivan remembers the struggles she had at the College but also says, "I am proud to relay my story of the love and support I received as a queer student at Holy Cross." And more than a decade later, Chris Campbell (HC '15) states flatly, "Leaving Jamaica to attend the College of the Holy Cross was the best thing that could have happened in my life."

There is no doubt that life for LGBTQ students at Holy Cross today can be significantly freer and more open than it once was, and this can only enhance everyone's overall learning experience. But to what point have things really evolved? None of the writers here, including the most recent graduates, view the College as entirely hospitable to sexual minorities. For many non-majority students, even today Holy Cross offers only "pockets of safety and grace," as Meghan Sweeney puts it. But that is clearly not enough for a college community committed to the full flourishing of all of its members.

### The Spiritual Challenge

A theologian can never avoid a key question for long: where is God in the experiences under consideration, in this case the lives of the LGBTQ authors here? Allow me to point to some of the places where I see the presence of God in these narratives.

First, let us recall the efforts of each of these alums to fashion an integral self, work carried out sometimes at great cost and with integrity. In the words of the Second Vatican Council, human beings are those creatures "who themselves decide their own

destiny.”<sup>17</sup> In other words, the great dignity of human persons is rooted in the fact that we are to a large extent self-creating beings. Being made in the image and likeness of God means that we human beings not only come from God but are meant to be creative like our Creator. Indeed, we are co-creators with God. And the most important thing we create is our own selves, our persons—that is, we decide for good or ill who we are, what we stand for, and what will claim our ultimate allegiance. Even--or better, especially--God will respect our decision about the kind of people we wish to be. Our capacity to “decide our destiny” makes us “like God”-- that is, “God-like”--and invests us with absolute worth, as the Council would say. In the life-stories recounted here, a person of faith cannot help but see divine-human cooperation at work.

Second, each of the authors in this volume reveals dedication not only to self-liberation but, strikingly, a commitment to the liberation of others, including those who have misunderstood or mistreated them. For the Christian believer, their goal—liberation for all--and the persistence, courage, and savvy with which they have pursued that goal, cannot help but recall the public words and deeds of Jesus. Redemption means rescuing that which was lost or is about to be lost. The writers here reveal, perhaps unsuspectingly, their collaboration in God’s redeeming activity, in their own lives and in the lives of those around them.

Finally, let us not overlook the frustration and even failures that these authors experienced in their struggles for liberation and fullness of life while at Holy Cross. But let’s also recall the responses they made to setbacks, lies, and failures. What some readers may find striking, or even strange, is the fact that most of these writers claim that

<sup>17</sup> Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 1965) par. 14.

the very religious tradition which sanctioned their oppression and caused them great pain also turned out to be a source of inspiration and hope. They came to see the Catholic Church itself as *both oppressive and liberating*. How can this be? Only two possibilities exist, as I see it: either we are dealing with serious schizophrenia or with great maturity. The latter, of course, is the case here. But as the history of Christianity reveals, it is not uncommon for those oppressed by the Church's teaching and practice to discover that the core of that same tradition demands their liberation. And at the heart of this discovery by the oppressed stands an unexpected capacity for forgiveness. Examples abound: the indigenous peoples and African slaves of the Americas, women everywhere, and LGBTQ Christians (and those of other traditions and of no tradition) today. Meaningful re-interpretation of doctrine and adjustment of practice--themselves acts of co-creation with God--are always accompanied by the act of forgiveness. And what gives rise to the ability to forgive if not the Holy Spirit of God? The authors here, whether they recognize it or not, extend to Holy Cross—and the Church it serves—an offer of forgiveness which can be seen in their very willingness to share their stories and the hope they have for their alma mater.

The heart of the matter is in fact a matter of the heart. As people on all sides of the debate about sexual identity know, but sometimes refrain from saying, LGBTQ people, like others who are “different” from the majority in one way or another, are not, at this point in time, asking for mere tolerance. Toleration means putting up with something or someone you in fact view with disdain or even despise. Tolerance is not an adequate expression of Christian faith. Only love is. The life-stories told in this volume represent an invitation to the Church, made in love, to move beyond falsehoods which separate

human beings and enter into a profound communion rooted in truth. These writers--and the many others whom they represent--invite the reader to see and celebrate the beauty and goodness of diversity. In their stories, readers who see and hear with their hearts may glimpse the deepest level of human life and, at one and the same time, the mysterious depth of God's love.

Christians believe that God's Last Word has already been spoken in history: it is the Word of Life announced at Easter, rising from the desolation of the Cross. But *our* last word has not yet been heard—or even spoken. Nor have we heard the last word from Holy Cross, or from the Church, on sexuality. Indeed, there are many chapters still to be written and added to the ones we read here with wonder and gratitude and hope. We await them all.

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Christopher Campbell** graduated from Holy Cross in 2015 with a B.A. in Religious Studies and went on to get a Masters in Higher Education and Student Affairs Administration from the University of Vermont. He is currently the Assistant Director of Residential Life for Education and Engagement at Amherst College in Amherst, MA.

In January 1998, **Richard Carlstrom** formed Carlstrom Productions, Inc., a corporate event, media and entertainment production company based in San Mateo, California. He has been a producer of corporate events for over 33 years and has worked in venues all over the world. Richard has been married to Joel Samuels since January 1995. They reside in Ashland, OR, San Mateo, CA, and spend summers on Nantucket Island, MA.

**Carlito Espudo** graduated from College of the Holy Cross in 2018 with B.A. degrees in Sociology and English. They are a queer, genderfunky Chicanx writer, born and raised in Palm Springs, California. You can find him earning his MFA at UCSD as the San Diego Fellow in Literature.. Their poetry investigates themes of family, gender, and memory through a multicultural lens. Currently, Espudo is the Poetry Editor at *Name and None* magazine, and his debut chapbook, *boy if* was the winner of the 2019 OutWrite Chapbook Competition.

**Ellen J. Keohane** graduated from Holy Cross in 1983 with a B.A. in Mathematics and is currently the Chief Information Officer at the College. Ellen holds a Masters degree in Computer Science from Worcester Polytechnic Institute and a Doctorate of Management in Organizational Leadership from the University of Phoenix. Ellen and her spouse, Sara Smithson '84, reside in Worcester and Hingham, MA.

**Lawrence Manfredi** ('03) is the lead Salesforce engineer for a commercial real estate startup “unicorn” in New York City. Technology and theology have always been his passions. He currently lives in Manhattan’s Hell’s Kitchen.

**Malcolm McCluskey** graduated from Holy Cross in 1999 and lives in Washington, DC. Since graduating, Malcolm has been working in Catholic schools as a Theology teacher and administrator. He holds an MA in Educational Administration from the University of Notre Dame.

**Rusmir Musić** is the Global Business Development Lead for IFC's EDGE Green Buildings Market Transformation Program. Rusmir joined IFC in 2011 where he initially worked as Strategy Officer for the Climate Business Department and was part of the team that synthesized IFC's Climate Implementation Plan. Rusmir hails from Bosnia and Herzegovina, which he left at age 17 - as a war refugee - for the United States. He received his BA in Chemistry from the College of the Holy Cross and his MA in Humanities and Social Thought from New York University. After working in the education sector, he received an MBA from Georgetown University's McDonough School of Business, where he was Salutatorian of his class.

**James B. Nickoloff** taught Catholic systematic theology from 1989 to 2009 at Holy Cross where he also took part in the Latin American Studies, Peace and Conflict Studies, and Women's and Gender Studies programs. Now Associate Professor Emeritus of the Department of Religious Studies, he has also taught at Boston College, Weston Jesuit School of Theology (Cambridge, MA), Santa Clara University, the Jesuit Theological College (Melbourne, Australia), and the Catholic Theological Union (Chicago). He is currently Director of Ministerial Formation in the Department of Theology and Philosophy at Barry University (Miami Shores, FL).

**Nan O'Connor** graduated from Holy Cross in 1984 and is a licensed clinical social worker in San Francisco where she was Project Coordinator for the HIV Mental Health Case Management Team at South Van Ness Adult Behavioral Health Services from which she retired in 2016. She currently has a private psychotherapy practice where she provides individual and couples counseling to adults. She resides in San Francisco with Ellen Littman, her life partner.

**Carmine Salvucci** graduated from Holy Cross in 1984 and holds an MBA from Northwestern University (1993). He spent many years in fund development, first at Northwestern University and then at Stanford. Carmine also served as Chief Development Officer for Children's Bureau, a century-old child abuse prevention agency in Los Angeles. Carmine and his partner, Steve Brister, and their adopted son, Baltazar, later relocated to Austin, Texas where he now serves as Chief Development Officer of Communities in Schools of Central Texas.

**Jeannie Seidler** graduated from Holy Cross in 1996 and then earned her Master's degree from Smith College School for Social Work in 2000. As a Clinical Social Worker, Jeannie has a psychotherapy practice in Cambridge, MA, specializing in working with individuals and couples around LGBT issues, trauma, depression, and relational concerns. Jeannie married her partner, Vali Kahn, in 2010. She now lives with their 2 young children, Niels and Frankie, and together they are grieving the loss of Vali who died of cancer earlier this year.

**Mairead Sullivan** ('03) holds a PhD in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies from Emory University and is currently Assistant Professor of Women's and Gender Studies at Loyola Marymount University. Mairead lives in Los Angeles.

**Meghan T. Sweeney**, a native of New York, NY, lives in the Boston, MA neighborhood of Jamaica Plain with her spouse, Margaret Lias, whom she met in a church music band while working on her PhD in Theological Studies at Emory University. They moved to Boston in summer 2006 and were married that December. A sophomore transfer to the College of the Holy Cross, Meghan majored in Religious Studies and was involved in many campus ministries and some intramural athletics. After college, Meghan served for a year in JVC South, then worked for two years as a paralegal at a law firm before beginning her master's degree at Harvard Divinity School. Meghan is now in her 14<sup>th</sup> year at Boston College where she is Associate Professor of the Practice of Theology and director of the PULSE Program for Service Learning. Meghan is an Episcopal priest and is active in parish ministry.